SEARSON

ART OF CONTENT-MENT

BALTIMORE (1796)



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ART OF CONTENTMENT;

WITH SEVERAL

ENTERTAINING PIECES

OF

Poetry,

DESCRIPTIVE OF THE PRESENT TIME

IN THE

U. States *of* America.

By JOHN SEARSON,

Formerly a Merchant of Philadelphia.

We to ourselves may all our wishes grant,
For nothing coveting, we nothing want;
They cannot want, who wish not to have more;
Contented minds may smile when counted poor.
DRYDEN.

Phil. 4*th* & 11*th*—*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

BALTIMORE:

Printed for the Author *by W. PECHIN.*

To his Excellency

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Sir,

FROM the amiable character I have heard of you, both in this country (where I have resided many years in the various spheres of life) and in Europe, I am induced to dedicate to you this publication.

When I last returned to this country, I did myself the honor to wait upon your Excellency, in September, 1796, before your resignation of the Presidency of the United States, and presented to you a Poem I composed upon the "*Rural and Romantic Scenes of* Down Hill," near Colerain, Ireland, the seat of the Earl of Bristol, and Bishop of the Diocese of Londonderry—for a copy of which, many of the gentlemen of that country gave me a guinea.

Your Excellency was so humane and condescending, as to countenance my in-

tention of publiſhing by ſubſcription, a Poem, ſuited to the then preſent ſtate of America, for which I obtained above 1200 ſubſcribers. And your Excellency's condeſcending and polite letter, for tranſmitting a Poem to you at Mount Vernon, merits by moſt ſincere gratitude.

The Book now publiſhed may be uſeful to all deſcriptions of both ſexes, as the times are indeed alarming, and the art of contentment rendered an eſſential ſtudy of mankind, in purſuit of *real happineſs*.

I ſhould have done myſelf the pleaſure of waiting on your Excellency, for liberty of addreſſing the following Treatiſe to your patronage, but an indiſpoſition, and fear of tranſgreſſing on your delicacy prevented—As it is only to gentlemen of ſuperior rank and noted abilities, we can look for literary encouragement in any country for promoting learning and ſcience. May every encourager of this work join me in fervent prayer to Heaven, that every real felicity may ever await your Excellency.

I have the honor to ſubſcribe myſelf, with the moſt profonnd reſpect and gratitude, Sir, Your Excellency's moſt devoted, and obedient humble Servant,

JOHN SEARSON.

THE

Author's Address.

A PREFACE *or Introduction to a book, is generally looked for, as alſo ſome account of the Author's life, character, &c.—but, as it is a mere matter of form, and of little conſequence to the public, I ſhall limit myſelf in that reſpect, truſting, that the production alone, will be a ſufficient recommendation.*

I was born in the North of Ireland, of an Engliſh family, and educated in the weſtern part of that kingdom, chiefly in the city of Cork, by two of my uncles, clergymen of the Church of England, and early went abroad an apprentice to a merchant in the Iſland of Tortola, in the Weſt-Indies; but not enjoying my health there, I returned to Ireland, and from thence at an early period of my life came over to America, where I remained about twenty-ſix years, in various ſpheres of life; married reputably in the city of Philadelphia, and after the deceaſe of my wife, I returned

to Ireland, where I was master of some considerable schools or academies, but returned again to America in 1776, *on some business. When in Ireland, I wrote two Poems, romantic and descriptive, which were well received, and handsomely encouraged by several gentlemen of respectability in that country:—and in* 1797, *published a book of Poems, for which I was equally rewarded in Philadelphia.*

The prose part of the " ART OF CONTENTMENT," *is chiefly selected from the first European writers. Several of the pieces (those descriptive of America particularly) are my own, with the Acrostic on the late President: when I quote from another author, generally give credit.*

The times indeed are alarming; and if ever composure to the dispensations of Heaven were necessary, it will in all probability be so, when the cloud bursts that hangs over the Land.—Contentment *can only make it supportable. St. Paul says,* he had learnt contentment: *so it is to be learned, and not immediately obtained, as some other blessings are.*

I most sincerely thank my subscribers for their benevolence towards me, and am,

Their ever obliged,

And devoted hum. Servt.

JOHN SEARSON.

THE
ART *of* CONTENTMENT.

SECTION. I.

Of the neceſſary Connection between Happineſs and Contentment.

GOD, who is eſſentially happy in himſelf, can receive no acceſſion to his felicity by the poor contributions of men. He cannot therefore be ſuppoſed to have made them upon intuition of increaſing, but communicating his happineſs. And this his original deſign is very viſible in all the parts of his Oeconomy towards them. When lapſed man had counterplotted againſt himſelf, defeated the purpoſe of the Divine goodneſs, and plunged his whole nature into the oppoſite ſtate of endleſs miſery; he yet reinforced his firſt deſign, and by an expedient as full of wonder as mercy, the death of his Son, recovers him

to his former capacity of bliſs. And that it might not only be a bare capacity, he has added all other methods proper to work upon a rational creature. He has ſhewn him his danger, ſet before him in perſpective that eternal Tophet, which he is adviſed to ſhun. On the other ſide, he has no leſs lively deſcribed the heavenly Jeruſalem, the celeſtial Country to which he is to aſpire: Nay farther, has levelled his road to it, leads him, not as he did the Iſraelites through the wilderneſs, through intricate mazes to puzzle his underſtanding; through *a land of drought, wherein were fiery ſerpents and ſcorpions*, Deut. viii. 15. to diſcourage and affright him, but has in the Goſpel chalked out a plain, a ſafe, nay a pleaſant path; as much ſuperior both in the eaſe of the way, and in the end to which it leads, as Heaven is to *Canaan*.

2. By doing this, he has not only ſecured our grand and ultimate happineſs, but provided for our intermedial alſo.

Thoſe Chriſtian duties which are to carry us to heaven, are our refreſhment, our viaticum in our journey; his yoke is not to gall and fret us, but an engine by which we may with eaſe (and almoſt inſenſibly) draw all the clogs and incumbrances of

human life. For whether we take Chriſtianity in its whole complex, or in its ſeveral and diſtinct branches, 'tis certainly the moſt excellent, the moſt compendious art of happy living: Its very taſks are rewards, and its precepts are nothing but a divine ſort of alchymy, to ſublime at once our nature and our pleaſures.

3. This may be evidenced in every particular of the evangelical law: But having formerly made ſome attempt towards it in another* tract, I ſhall not here reaſſume the whole ſubject. I ſhall only ſingle out one particular precept, wherein happineſs is not (as the others) only implied, and muſt be catched at the rebound by conſequence and event; but is literally expreſt, and is the very matter of the duty; I mean the precepts of acquieſcence and *Contentment:* Happineſs and this true genuine Contentment, being terms ſo convertible, that to bid us be content, is but another phraſe for bidding us be happy.

4. Temporal enjoyments, ſuch as are pleaſure, wealth, honor, and the reſt, tho' they make ſpacious pretences to the meaſure of human happineſs, are all of them juſtly diſcarded by the Philoſopher in his

* Decay of Chriſtian Piety.

Ethicks, upon this one conſideration, that coming from abroad they may be withheld or taken from us: And our tenure being precarious, we even for that reaſon are unhappy in our moſt deſirable poſſeſſions; becauſe we ſtill are liable to be ſo. And therefore he concludes, that felicity muſt be placed in the mind and ſoul; which ſtands without the reach of fortune; and in the practice of virtue, which in its own nature, and not in its contingent uſe, is truly good, and therefore certainly renders the poſſeſſors ſuch.

5. But this practice being diffuſed thro' the whole extent of moral duty, *Epictetus* thought he had deſerved well of human nature, when he drew it up in two ſhort words, to *ſuſtain* and *abſtain*: That is, to bear with conſtancy adverſe events, and with moderation enjoy thoſe that are proſperous. Which complexure of philoſophy is yet more fully, as well as more compendiouſlly expreſſed in the ſingle notion of *Contentment*: Which involves the patient bearing of all miſadventures, and generous contempt of ſenſual illectives. This ſtate of mind the Greeks expreſs by calling it ſelf-ſufficiency, which, we know, properly ſpeaking, is one of the incommunicable attributes of the divine nature, and the Stoicks expreſsly pretend, that by it

mortal men are enabled to rival their gods; in *Seneca's* phraſe, to make a controverſy with *Jupiter* himſelf. But abating the inſolent blaſphemy of an independent felicity, chriſtianity acknowledges a material truth in the aſſertion: And St. *Paul* declares of himſelf, that having *learnt how to want, and how to abound, and in whatever ſtate he happens to be in, therewith to be content: he is able to do all things through Chriſt that ſtrengthens him*, Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13. *And having nothing to poſſeſs all things*, 2 Cor. vi. 10.

6. Which great event comes about, not only becauſe all good things are eminently in the divine nature, and he who by virtue and religion poſſeſſes Him, thereby in a full equivalence has every thing; but alſo upon human meaſures, and principles of philoſophy. The compendious addreſs to wealth, as *Plato* rightly obſerved, being not to increaſe poſſeſſions, but leſſen deſires. And if ſo it will follow, that the contented man muſt be abundantly provided for, being ſo entirely ſatisfied with what he has, as to have no deſires at all. Indeed 'tis truly ſaid of covetous men, and is equally verified of all who have any deſire to gratify, that they want no leſs what they have, than what they have not; but the reverſe of that paradox is really made

good by *Contentment*, which beſtows on men the enjoyment of whatever they have, and alſo whatever they have not; and by teaching to want nothing, abundantly ſecures not to want happineſs.

7. On the other ſide, this one grace being abſent, it is not in the power of any ſucceſs or affluence to make life a tolerable thing. Let all the materials of earthly happineſs be amaſt together, and flung upon one man, they will without Contentment be but like the fatal prize of *Tarpeia's* treaſon, who was preſt to death with the weight of her booty. He that has the elements of felicity, and yet cannot form them into ſatisfaction; is more deſperately miſerable than he that wants them: For he who wants them has yet ſomething to hope for, and thinks if he had them he might be happy; but he who inſignificantly poſſeſſes them, has no reſerve, has not ſo much as the flattery of an expectation; for he has nothing left to deſire, and yet can be as little ſaid to enjoy.

8. He therefore that would have the extract, the quinteſſence of happineſs, muſt ſeek it in Content. All outward acceſſions are but the droſs and earthly part; this alone is the ſpirit, which when 'tis once ſeparated, depends not upon the fate

of the other ; but preſerves its vigor when that is deſtroyed. St. *Paul*, whom I before mentioned, is a ready inſtance of it, who profeſſes to be *content in whatever ſtate ;* Contentment being not ſo inſeparately linked to eternal things, but that they may ſubſiſt apart. That thoſe are often without it we are too ſure, and that it may be without them is as certainly true ; though by our own default we have not ſo many examples of it. A heart that rightly computes the difference between temporals and eternals, may reſolve with the prophet, *Although the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall fruit be in the vines ; the labor of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields ſhall yield no meat ; the flock ſhall be cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be no herd in the ſtalks ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my ſalvation*,, Hab. iii. 17, 18. He that has God need not much deplore the want of any thing elſe : Nor can he that conſiders the plenty and glory of his future ſtate, be much dejected with the want or abjectneſs of his preſent.

9. Yet ſo indulgent is God to our infirmities, that knowing how unapt our impatient natures are to *walk* only *by faith, and not at all by ſight*, 2 Cor. v. 7. he is pleaſed to give us fair antepaſts of ſatisfaction here, diſpenſes his temporal bleſſings, tho'

not equally, yet ſo univerſally, that he that has leaſt, has enough to oblige not only his acquieſcence, but his thankfulneſs. Though every man has not all his wiſhes, yet he has that which is more valuable than that he complains to want; nay which he himſelf could worſe ſpare were it put to his option.

10. And now from ſuch a diſpoſure of things, who would not expect that mankind ſhould be the cheerfulleſt part of the creation? that the *ſun ſhould* not more *rejoice to run his courſe*, Pſal. xix. 5. than man ſhould to finiſh his: That a journey which has ſo bleſſed an end, and ſuch good accommodation by the way, ſhould be paſſed with all imaginable alacrity, and that we ſhould live here practicers and learners of the ſtate of unmixed, interminable joys, to which we aſpire. But alas, if we look upon the univerſality of men, we ſhall find it nothing ſo, but while all other creatures gladſomely follow the order of their creation, take pleaſure in thoſe things God has aſſigned for them, we with a ſullen perverſeneſs quarrel at what we ſhould enjoy, and in every thing make it our buſineſs, not to fit it for our uſe, but to find out ſome concealed quality which may render it unfit. We look inſidiouſly upon our bleſſings, like men that deſigned only

to pick a quarrel, and ſtart a pretence for mutining. From hence it is that man who was deſigned the lord of the world, to whoſe ſatisfaction all inferior beings were to contribute, is now the unhappieſt of the creatures : Nay as if the whole order of the univerſe were inverted, he becomes ſlave to his own vaſſals, courts all theſe little ſublunary things with ſuch paſſion, that if they prove coy and fly his embraces, he is mad and deſperate ; if they fling themſelves into his arms, he is then glutted and ſatiated ; like Amnon, *he hates more than he loved*, 2 Sam. xiii. 15. and is ſicker of his poſſeſſion, than he was of his deſire.

11. And thus will it ever be, till we can keep our deſires more at home, and not ſuffer them to ramble after things without our reach. That honeſt Roman, who from his extraordinary induſtry upon his little ſpot of ground, received ſuch an increaſe, as brought him under ſuſpicion of witchcraft, is a good example for us. God has placed none of us in ſo barren a ſoil, in ſo forlorn a ſtate, but there is ſomething in it which may afford us comfort ; let us huſband that to the utmoſt, and it is ſcarce imaginable what improvement, even he that appears the moſt miſerable, may make of his condition. But if in a ſullen humour we will not cultivate our own

field, because we have perhaps more mind to our neighbors, we may thank ourselves if we starve. The despising of what God has already given us, is sure but cold invitation to farther bounty. Men are indeed forced sometimes to reward the mutinous; but God is not so to be attacked, nor is it that sort of violence which can ever force heaven. The Heathen could say, that *Jupiter* sent his plagues among the poorer sort of men, because they were always repining: And indeed there is so much of truth in the observation, that our impatience and discontent at our present condition, is the greatest provocation to God to make it worse.

12. It must therefore be resolved to be very contrary to our interest, and surely it is no less to our duty. It is so if we do but own ourselves men, for in that is implied a subordination and submission to that power which has made us so; and to dispute his management of the world, to make other distributions of it than what he has done, is to renounce our subjection, and set up for dominion. But this is yet more intolerable as we are christians, it being a special part of the evangelical discipline, cheerfully to conform to any condition; *know how to be abased, and how to abound, to be full, and to be hungry*, Phil.

iv. 12. *to be careful for nothing*, ver. 6. Nay, so little does Christ give countenance to our peevish discontents, our wanton outcries when we are not hurt, that he requires more than a contentment, an exultancy and transport of joy under the heaviest pressures, under reproaches and persecutions, *Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy*, Luke vi. 23. And sure nothing can be more contrary to this, than to be always whining and complaining, crying in the Prophet's phrase, *My leanness, my leanness, woe is me*, Isa. xxiv. 16. when perhaps *Moses'* simile does better fit our state, *Jesurun waxed fat and kicked*, Deut. xxxii. 15.

13. And as this querulous humour is against our interest and duty, so is it visibly against our ease. It is a sickness of the mind, a perpetual knawing and craving of the appetite, without any possibility of satisfaction; and indeed is the same in the heart which the *Caninus appetitus* is in the stomach: to which we may aptly enough apply that description we find in the prophet, *He shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry, and he shall eat on the left and not be satisfied*, Isa. ix. 20. Where this sharp, this fretting humour abounds, nothing converts into nourishment: Every new accession does but excite some new

desire; and as 'tis observed of a trencher-fed dog, that he tastes not one bit for the greedy expectation of the next; so a discontented mind is so intent upon his pursuits, that he has no relish of his acquest. So that what the prophet speaks of the covetous, is equally applicable to all other sorts of mal-contents; *He enlarges his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied*, Hab. ii. 5. And sure if the *desire accomplished* be, as *Solomon* says, *sweet to the soul*, Prov. xiii. 19. it must be exceedingly bitter, to be thus condemned to endless unaccomplished desires; and yet this is the torture which every repining uncontented spirit provides for itself.

14. What a madness is it then for men to be so desperately bent against their interest and duty, as to renounce even their ease too for company? One would think this age were sensual enough to be at defiance with the least shadow of uneasiness. It is so I am sure where it ought not, every thing is laborious when it is in compliance with their duty: A few minutes spent in prayer, *Oh what a weariness is it!* Mal. ii. 13. If they chance but to miss a meal, they are ready to cry out, their *knees are weak through fasting*, Psal. cix. 24. yet they can without regret, or any self compassion, macerate and cruciate themselves

with anxious cares and vexations, and as the apoſtle ſpeaks, 1 Tim. vi. 10, *Pierce themſelves through with many ſorrows.* That propoſal therefore which was very raſhly made by St. *Peter* to our Saviour, *Maſter, pity thyſelf*, Mat. xvi. 22. which we render *be it far from thee*, would here be an adviſed motion to the generality of mankind, who are commonly made unhappy, not by any thing without them, but by the reſtleſs impatience that is within them.

15. It may therefore be a ſeaſonable office to endeavor the appeaſing thoſe ſtorms, by recalling them to theſe ſober rational conſiderations, which may ſhew as well the folly, as uneaſineſs of this repining unſatisfiable humour. It is certain that in true reaſoning we can find nothing whereon to found it, but a great deal to enforce the contrary. Indeed it is ſo much againſt the dictate of reaſonable nature to affect damage, ſin, and torment, that were there nothing elſe to be ſaid, but what I have already mentioned, it might competently diſcover the great unreaſonableneſs of this ſin.

16. But we need not confine our appeal to reaſon, as it is only a judge of utility and advantage: but enlarge it to ano-

ther notion, as it is judge of equity and right: in which reſpect alſo it gives a clear and peremptory ſentence againſt all murmuring impatience. To evince this, I ſhall inſiſt upon theſe particulars. *Firſt*, That God is debtor to man, and therefore whatever he affords to any, it is upon bounty, not of right, a benevolence not a due. *Secondly*, That this bounty is not ſtrait or narrow, confined to ſome few particular perſons, and wholly over-ſkipping the reſt, but more or leſs univerſally diffuſed to all. So that he who has the leaſt, cannot juſtly ſay but he has been liberally dealt with. *Thirdly*, That if we compare our bleſſings with our allays, our good things with our evil, we will find our good far ſurmounting. *Fourthly*, That we ſhall find them yet more ſo, if we compare them with the good we have done; as on the contrary, we ſhall find our afflictions ſcarce diſcernable if balanced with our ſins. *Fifthly*, That as God is rector of the univerſe, ſo it appertains to him to make ſuch allotments, ſuch diſtributions as may beſt preſerve the ſtate of the whole. *Sixthly*, That God notwithſtanding that univerſal care, has alſo a peculiar aſpect on every particular perſon, and diſpoſes to him what he diſcerns beſt for him in ſpecial. *Seventhly*, If we compare our adverſities with thoſe

of other men, we ſhall always find ſomething that equals, if nnot exceeds our own. All theſe are certain irrefragable truths, and there is none of them ſingle, but may, if well preſt upon the mind, charm it into a calmneſs and reſignation; but when there is ſuch a conſpiration of arguments, it muſt be a very obſtinate perverſeneſs that can reſiſt them: Or ſhould they fail to enforce a full conviction, will yet introduce thoſe ſubſidiary proofs, which I have to alledge, ſo advantageouſly, as will, being put altogether, amount unto perfect and uncontrollable evidence.

If you'll be happy, be content;
Nor let vain Cares diſturb thy peace:
GOD, *who is good and kind, hath ſent*
This Meſſage down to human Race.

Sect. II.

Of God's Abſolute Sovereignty.

THE firſt propoſition that God is debtor to no man, is too clear and apparent to require much of illuſtration: For as he is a free agent, and may act as he pleaſes, ſo he is the ſole proprietary, and can wrongfully detain from none, becauſe all original right is in himſelf. This has been ſo much acknowledged by the blindeſt heathens, that none of them durſt make inſolent addreſſes to their gods, challenge any thing of them as of debt, but by ſacrifices and prayers owned their dependance and wants, and implored ſupplies. And ſure, chriſtianity teaches us not to be more ſaucy. If thoſe deities who owed their very being to their votaries, were yet acknowledged to be the ſpring and ſource of all, we can with no pretence deny it to that ſupreme power, in *whom we live, move, and have our being*, Acts xvii. 28. For if it were merely an act of his choice to give us a being, all his ſubſequent bounties can have no other original than his own good pleaſure. We could put no obligation upon God before we were; and when we began to be, we were his creatures, and ſo by the moſt indiſputable right owe ourſelves to him, but can have no antecedent

title on which to claim any thing from him: So that the apoſtle might well make the challenge which he doth on God's behalf, *Who hath given any thing unto him, and it ſhall be recompenced to him again?* Rom. xi. 35.

2. Now ordinary diſcretion teaches us, not to be too bold in our expectation from one to whom we can plead no right. It has as little of prudence as modeſty, to preſs impudently upon the bounty of a patron, and does but give him temptation (at leaſt pretence) to deny. And if it be thus with men, who poſſibly may ſometimes have an intereſt, ſometimes a vanity to oblige; it muſt be much more ſo towards God, who cannot be in want of us, and therefore need not buy us: *Our good*, as the pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *extends not to him*, Pſal. xvi. 2. He has a fundamental right in that little we are, which will ſtand good tho' it ſhould never be corroborated by greater beneſits. With what an humble baſhfulneſs ſhould we then ſue for any thing, who have no argument to invite the leaſt donation, being already ſo pre-engaged, that we cannot mortgage ſo much as ourſelves in conſideration of any new favor? And ſurely, extravagant hopes do very ill beſit people in this condition. We ſee the modeſty

of good *Mephiboſheth*, tho' he was by a ſlanderous accuſation outed of half the eſtate *David* had given him, yet upon a reflection that he derived it all from his good pleaſure, diſputed not the ſentence, but cheerfully reſigned to the ſame diſpoſure, from wqich he received it, ſaying, *Yea, let him take all*, 2 Sam. xix. 30. A rare example, and fit for imitation, as being adapted to the preſent caſe, not only in that one circumſtance of his having received all from the king, but alſo in that of the attainder of his blood; which he confeſſes in the former part of the 28th verſe, *For all of my father's houſe were but dead men before my Lord.* And alas! may we not ſay the very ſame? Was not our whole race tainted in our firſt parent? So that if God had not the primary title of vaſſalage, he would in our fall have acquired that of confiſcation and eſcheat. And can we think ourſelves then in terms to capitulate, and make our own conditions, and expect God ſhould humour us in all our wild demands?

3. This is indeed to keep up that old rebellion of our progenitor, for that conſiſted in a diſcontent with that portion God had aſſigned him, and coveting what he had reſtrained him. Nay indeed it comes up to the height of the devil's propoſal,

the attempting *to be as God*, Gen. iii. 5. For 'tis an endeavor to wreſt the management out of his hands, to ſupercede his authority of diſpenſing to us, and to carve for ourſelves. This is ſo mad an inſolence, that were it poſible to ſtate a caſe exactly parallel between man and man, it would raiſe the indignation of any that but pretended to ingenuity. Yet this is, without hyperbole, the true meaning of every murmuring repining thought we entertain.

4. But as bad as it is, who is there of us, that can in this particular ſay, *We have made our hearts clean?* Prov. xx. 9. 'Tis true we make ſome formal acknowledgment ſometimes that we receive all from God's gift: Cuſtom teaches us from our infancy, after every meal we eat, to give him thanks (though even that is now thought too much reſpect, and begins to be diſcarded as unfaſhionable:) yet ſure he cannot be thought to do that in earneſt, that has all the time of his eating been grumbling that his table abounds not with ſuch delicacies as his neigbors. And yet at this rate God knows are moſt of our thanſkgivings. Indeed we have not ſo much ordinary civility to God, as we have to men. The common proverb

teaches us, not to pry too curiouſly into the blemiſhes of what is given us; but on God's gifts we ſit as cenſors, nicely examine every thing which is in any way diſagreeable to our fancies, and as if we dealt with him under the notion of chapmen, diſparage it, as *Soloman* ſays, buyers uſe to do, *It is naught, it is naught ſaith the buyer*, Prov. xx. 14. Nay we ſeem yet more abſurdly to change the ſcene, and as if God were to make oblations to us, we as critically obſerve the defects of his benefactions, as the Levitical prieſts were to do thoſe of the ſacrifice, and (like angry Deities) ſcornfully reject, whatever does not perfectly anſwer our wanton appetites.

5. And now, ſhould God take us at our words, withdraw all thoſe bleſſings which we ſo faſtidiouſly deſpiſe, what a condition were we in? 'Tis ſure we have nothing to plead in reverſe of that Judgment. There is nothing in it againſt juſtice; for he takes but his own. This he intimates to Iſreal, Hoſ. ii. 9. *I will return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the ſeaſon thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax:* In which he aſſerts his own property, *My corn, my wine*, &c. and recalls them to the remembrance that they were but uſufructuaries. And 'tis as evident that our tenure is but the ſame. Nay this proceeding would not be repugnant

even to mercy, for even that is not obliged ſtill to proſtitute itſelf to our contempt. I am ſure ſuch a toleration is beyond all the meaſures of human lenity. Should any of us offer an alms to an indigent wretch, and he when he ſees 'tis ſilver, ſhould murmur and exclaim that it is not gold, would we not draw back our hand, and reſerve our charity for a more worthy object? 'Tis true indeed, God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor our narrow bowels equal meaſures for the devine compaſſion; and we experimentally find that his long-ſuffering infinitely exceeds ours; yet we know he does in the parable of the lord and the ſervant, *Matt.* xxviii. declare, that he will proportion his mercy by ours, in that inſtance; and we have no promiſe that he will not do it in this; nay we have all reaſon to expect he ſhould: For ſince his wiſdom prompts him to do nothing in vain, and all his bounty to us is deſigned to make us happy, when he ſees that end utterly fruſtrated by our diſcontents, to what purpoſe ſhould he continue that to which we will be never the better for?

6. Beſides tho' he be exceedingly patient, yet he is not negligent or inſenſible; he takes particular notice, not only with what diligence we employ, but with what affections we reſent every of his bleſſings.

And as ingratitude is a voice odious to men ſo it is extremely provoking to God ; ſo that in this ſenſe alſo, rhe words of our Saviour are moſt true, *Fron him that hath not (i. e.)* that hath not a grateful ſenſe and value, *ſhall be taken away even that he hath* Mat. xxv. 29. But we may find a threatning of this kind, more expreſs to Iſreal. *Becauſe thou ſervedſt not the Lord thy God with gladneſs, and with joyfulneſs of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore ſhall thou ſerve thine enemies, whom the Lord God will ſend among thee, in hunger, and in thirſt, and in nakedneſs, and in want of all things*, Deut. xxviii. 27. A ſad and diſmal inverſion, yet founded wholly in the want of that cheerful recognition which God expected from them. And if Iſrael, the lot of his inheritance, that people whom he had ſingled out from all the nations of the world, could thus forfeit his favor by unthankfulneſs, ſure none of us can ſuppoſe we have any ſurer entail of it. In a word, as God loves a cheerful giver, ſo he alſo loves a cheerful receiver; one that complies with his end in beſtowing, by taking a juſt complacence in his gifts. But the querulous and unſatisfied, reproach his bounty ; accuſe him of illiberality and narrowneſs of mind. So that he ſeems even in his honor engaged to bring them to a righter

apprehenſion of him, and by a deprivation teach them the value of thoſe good things which they could not learn by the enjoyment.

7. If therefore ingenuity and gratitude cannot, yet at leaſt let prudence and ſelf-love engage us againſt this ſin of *Murmuring*, which we ſee does abundantly juſtify the character the wiſe man gives, when he tells us, *'tis unprofitable*, Wiſd. i. 11. he might have ſaid pernicious alſo; for ſo it evidently is in it's effects. Let us then arm ourſelves againſt it, and to that purpoſe impreſs deeply upon our minds the preſent conſideration, That God owes us nothing, and that whatever we receive is an alms, and not a tribute. *Diogenes* being aſked what wine drank the moſt pleaſant, anſwered, That which is drank at another's coſt. And this circumſtance we can never miſs of to recommend our good things to us: For be they little or much, they come *gratis*. When therefore in a pettiſh mood we find ourſelves apt to charge God fooliſhly, and to think him ſtrait-handed towards us, let us imagine we hear God expoſtulating with us, as the houſholder in the parable, *Friend I do thee no wrong: is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?* Mat.

xx. 15. If God have not the right of disposing, let us find out those that have, and see how much better we shall speed: But if he hath let us take heed of disputing with him: We that subsist merely by his favor, had need court and cherish it by all the arts of humble observance. Every man is ready to say how ill beggary and pride do agree. The first qualification we cannot put off: O let us not provide it of the other so inconvenient, so odious an adjunct. Let us leave off prescribing to God (which no ingenious man would do to an earthly benefactor) and let us betake ourselves to a more holy and successful policy, the acknowledgment of past mercies, and our own unworthiness. This was *Jacob's* method, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I am become two bands*; and with this humble preface he introduces his petition for rescue in his present distress, *Deliver me I pray thee from the hand of my brother*, &c. Gen. xxx. 10, 11. An excellent pattern of divine rhetoric, which the success demonstrates to have been very prevalent. And we cannot transcribe better copy, to render our desires as successful. Indeed we are so utterly destitute of all arguments from ourselves, that we

can make no reaſonable form of addreſs, if we found it not in ſomething of God: and there is nothing even in him adapted to our purpoſe, but his mercy; nor can that be ſo advantageouſly urged by any thing, as by the former inſtances it has given of itſelf: for as God only is fit to be a precedent to himſelf, ſo he loves to be ſo. Thus we find, not only *Moſes*, but God often recollecting his miraculous favors towards *Iſrael*, as an argument to do more: Let us therefore accoſt him in his own way, and by a frequent and grateful recounting of his former mercies, engage him to future. Nor need we be at a loſs for matter of ſuch recollection, if we will but ſeriouſly conſider what we have already received, which is the ſubject of the next ſection.

Since God doth rule, the ſovereign King,
Let all his creatures here below,
With grateful hearts his praiſes ſing,
For ev'ry Good he doth beſtow.

Sect. III.

Of God's unlimited Bounty.

IT is the kown character of an unworthy nature, to write injuries in marble, and benefits in duſt: and however ſome (as Senaca well obſerves) may acquit themſelves of this imputation as to man, yet ſcarce any do ſo in relation to God. 'Tis true indeed the charge muſt be a little varied; for God neither will nor can do us injury: Yet we receive any thing that is adverſe with ſuch a reſentment as if it were, and engrave that in our memories with indelible characters, whilſt his great and real benefits are either not at all obſerved, or with ſo tranſient an advertence, that the compariſon of duſt is beyond our pitch, and we may be more properly ſaid to write them in water. Nay ſo far are we from keeping records and regiſters of his favors, that even thoſe ſtanding and fit ones which ſenſe can prompt us to, (without the aid of our memories) cannot obtain our notice.

2. Were it not thus, it were impoſſible for men to be ſo perpetually in the complaining key, as if their voices were capable of no other ſound. One wants this,

and another that, and a third ſomething beyond them both, and ſo on *ad infinitum*; when all this while every one of them enjoys a multitude of good things without any remark. That very breath wherewith they utter their complaints, is a bleſſing, and a fundamental one too: for, if God ſhould withdraw that, they were incapable of whatſoever elſe they either have, or deſire. 'Tis true that ſome men's impatience hath riſen ſo high, as to caſt away life, becauſe it was not cloathed with all the circumſtances they wiſhed. Yet theſe are rare inſtances, and do only ſhew ſuch men's depraved judgment of things. A rich jewel is not the leſs valuable, becauſe a mad man in his raving fit flings it into the fire: But as to the generality of men, the Devil (though a liar) gave a true account of their ſenſe, when he ſaid, *Skin for ſkin, and that a man hath, will he give for his life*, Job. ii. 4. And though perhaps in an angry fit many men have with Jonas, Chap. iv. 3. *wiſhed to die*, yet ten to one, ſhould death then come, they would be as willing to divert it, as was the man in the Apologue, who wearied with his burden of ſticks, flung it down and called for death; but when he came, owned no other occaſion for him, but to be helped up again with his bundle. I dare in this appeal to the ex-

perience of thoſe, who have ſeemed very weary of life, whether when any ſudden danger has ſurpriſed them, it has not as ſuddenly altered their mind, and made them have a greater deſire for life, than before they abhorred it. 'Tis the common ſaying, as long as there is life there is hope: it is ſo, as to ſecular concerns, for what ſtrange revolutions do we often ſee in the age of man? From what deſpicable beginnings have many arrived to the moſt ſplendid conditions? Of which we have divers modern as well as ancient inſtances.

Indeed 'tis admirable to ſee what time & induſtry will (with God's bleſſing) effect. *But there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wiſdom in the grave*, Ec. ix. 10. we can improve no more when we are once tranſplanted thither.

3. But this is yet much more conſiderable in reſpect of our ſpiritual ſtate. Our life is the *day wherein we are to work*, John ix. (yea to work out Salvation:) but *when the night comes* (when death overtakes) *no man can work*. Now alas when it is conſidered how much of this day the moſt of us have ſtood idle till the ſixth or ninth hour, it will be our concern not to have our day cloſe before the eleventh.

Nay alas it is yet worſe with us: We have not only been idle, but very often ill buſied; ſo that we have a great part of our time to unravel, and that is not to be done in a moment. For though our works may fitly enough be repreſented by the Prophet's compariſon of a *ſpider's web*, Iſa. lix. 5. yet they want the beſt property even of that; they cannot be ſo ſoon undone. Vices that are radicated by time and cuſtom, lie too deep to be lightly ſwept away. It is no eaſy thing to perſuade ourſelves to the will of parting with them. Many violences we muſt offer to ourſelves, a long and ſtrict courſe of mortification muſt be gone through, e'er we can find in our hearts to bid them begone: And yet when we do ſo, they are not ſo tractible as the Centurions ſervants. They will indeed come when ever we bid them, but they will ſcarce go ſo: they muſt be expelled by force and by ſlow degrees; we muſt fight for every inch of ground we gain from them: And as God would not aſſiſt the Iſraelites to ſubdue the Canaanites at once, Deut. vii. 22. ſo neither ordinarily does he, us to maſter perfectly our corruptions. Now a proceſs of this difficulty is not to be diſpatched on a ſudden. And yet this is not all our taſk, for we have not only ill habits to extirpate, but we have alſo good ones to acquire: It is

not a mere negative virtue will ſerve our turns, nor will empty lamps enter us into the marriage-chamber, Mat. xxv. 10. *We muſt add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance*, &c. 2 Pet. i. 15.

4. And now I would deſire the Reader ſeriouſly to conſider, whether he can upon good grounds tell himſelf that this ſo difficult, (and yet ſo neceſſary) a work is effectually wrought in him. If it be, he is a happy man, and can with no pretence complain of any external want: (he that is fed with Manna, muſt be ſtrangely perverſe if he murmur for a belly-full of *leeks and onions*, Num. xi. 15.) But on the contrary, he owes infinite thanks to God, that has ſpared him time for this important buſineſs, and did not put a period to his natural life, before he had begun a ſpiritual. For I fear there are among the beſt of us few of ſo entire an innocence, but they may remember ſome, either habits or acts of ſin, in which it would have been dreadful for them to have been ſnatched away. And then how comprehenſive, how prolific a mercy has life been to them, when it has carried eternity in its womb, and their continuance on earth has qualified them for heaven? Neither are ſuch perſons only to look on it as

a bleſſing in the retroſpect, as it relates to the paſt, but alſo in the preſent and future; which if they continue to employ well, does not only confirm, but advance their reward. Beſides God may pleaſe by them to glorify himſelf, make them inſtrumental to his ſervice; which as it is the greateſt honor, ſo it is alſo the greateſt ſatisfaction to a good heart. He ſhews himſelf too mercenary that ſo longs for his reward, as to grow impatient of his attendance: He that loves God, thinks himſelf bleſt in the opportunity of doing work, as well as in receiving wages. Thus we ſee how life is under all theſe aſpects, a mercy to a pious man, and ſuch as not only obliges him to contentment, but gratitude.

5. But ſuppoſing a man cannot give this comfortable account of his life, but is conſcious that he has ſpent it to a very different purpoſe, yet does not that at all leſſen his obligations to God, who meant he ſhould have employed it better, and that he has not done ſo is merely his own fault. Nay indeed the worſe his ſtate is, the greater mercy it is, that God has not made it irreverſible, that he has not cut him off at once from the earth, and the poſſibility of Heaven too, but affords him

yet a longer *day*, *if* yet *he will hear his voice*, Pſal. xcv. 7. This long-ſuffering is one of the moſt tranſcendant acts of divine goodneſs, and therefore the Apoſtle rightly ſtiles it the *the riches of his goodneſs, and long ſuffering, and forbearance*, Rom. ii. 4. And ſo at laſt we commonly acknowledge it, when we have worn it out, and can no longer receive advantage by it. What a value does a gaſping deſpairing ſoul put upon a ſmall parcel of that time, which before he knew not how faſt enough to ſquander? Oh that men would ſet the ſame eſtimate on it before: and then certainly as it would make them better huſbands of it, ſo it would alſo render them more thankful for it, *Accounting that the long-ſuffering of our Lord is ſalvation*, 2. Pet. iii. 15.

6. Indeed did men but rightly compute the benefit of life upon this ſcore, all ſecular encumbrances and uneaſineſſes of it would be overwhelmed, and ſtand only as cyphers in the account. What a ſhame is it then that we ſhould ſpend our breath in ſighs and out-cries? which if we would employ to thoſe nobler ends for which it was given, would ſuperſede our complaints, and make us confeſs we were well dealt with: that *on life* (though bare and ſtripped of all outward acceſſaries) *is*

given us for a prey, Jer. xlv. 5. And indeed he that has yet the great work of life to do, can very ill ſpare time or ſorrow to beſtow upon the regretting any temporal diſtreſs, ſince his whole ſtock is little enough to bewail and repair his neglects of his eternal concerns. Were our lives therefore deſtitute of all outward comfort, nay were they nothing but a ſcene of perpetual diſaſters, yet this one advantage of life would infinitely outweigh them all, and render our murmuring very inexcuſable.

7. But God has not put this to the utmoſt trial, has never placed any man in ſuch a ſtate of unmixed calamity, but that he ſtill affords many and great comforts: he finds it fit ſometimes to diminiſh ſome of our outward comforts, and perhaps imbitter others, but he never takes all way. This muſt be acknowledged, if we do but conſider how many things there are in which the whole race of mankind do in common partake. The four elements, fire and water, air and earth, do not more make up every man's compoſition, that they ſupply his needs: the whole hoſt of heaven, the ſun, moon, and ſtars, *Moſes*, will tell us, are by *God divided to all nations under the whole heaven*, Deut. iv. 19. Thoſe reſplendent bodies,

equally afford their light and influence to all. The ſun ſhines as bright on the poor cottage, as on the moſt magnificent palace; and the ſtars have their benign aſpects, as well for *him that is behind the mill*, as for *him that ſitteth on the throne*, Exod. xi. 5. Property (the great incendiary below) breeds no confuſion in thoſe celeſtial orbs, but they are every man's treaſure, yet no man's peculiar,. (as if they meant to teach us, that our love of appropriation *deſcends not from above*, James iii. 15, is no heavenly quality.)

8. And as they make no diſtinction of the ranks and degrees of men, ſo neither do they of their virtues. Our Saviour tells us, God cauſes *his ſun to riſe on the juſt and on the unjuſt*, Mat. v. 45. If now we deſcend lower to the ſublunary creatures, they equally pay their homage to man, do not diſdain the dominion of the poor, and ſubmit to that of the rich, but ſhew us that their inſtinct extends to the whole nature. An horſe draws the poor man's plough, as tamely as the prince's charriot, and the beggar's hungry cur follows him with as much obſequioſneſs and affection, as the pampered lap-dogs of the niceſt ladies. The ſheep obey a poor mercenary ſhepherd as well as they did the daughter's of the wealthy *Laban*,

Gen. xxix. 9. or of *Jethro* a prince, *Exod.* ii. 26. and as willingly yield their fleece to clothe *Lazarus*, as to make purple for *Dives*. And as animals, ſo vegetables are as communicative of their qualities to one man as another. The corn nouriſhes, the fruits refreſh, the flowers delight, the ſimples cure the poor man as well as the rich.

9. But I foreſee it will be objected, that theſe natural privileges are inſignificant becauſe they are evacuated by thoſe poſitive laws which bound propriety, and that therefore though one man could uſe the creatures as well as another, yet every man have them not to uſe. I anſwer, that for ſome of the things I have mentioned, they are ſtill in their native latitude, cannot be incloſed or monopolized. The moſt ravenous oppreſſor could never yet lock up the ſun in his cheſt: *He that lays houſe to houſe, and land to land, till there be no place*, Iſa. v. 8. cannot incloſe the common air; and the like may be ſaid of divers of the reſt: So that there are ſome (and thoſe no mean bleſſings) which continue ſtill the indefeaſible right of mankind in general.

10. As for thoſe other things which are liable to the reſtrictive terms of *meum*

and *tuum*, 'tis not the diſpenſing them; as great as *Nathan's* parable deſcribes, when he ſpeaks of the numerous flocks of the rich man, and the *ſingle ewe lamb of the poor*, 2 Sam. xii. 2, yet there is ſcarce any ſo deplorably indigent, but by one means or other, he has or may have the neceſſary ſupports of life. Perhaps they fall not into his lap by birth-right and inheritance, yet they are acquirable by labor and induſtry, which is perhaps the better tenure. They cannot, it may be, arrive to *Sodom's fulneſs of bread*, yet if they have not her *abundance of idleneſs*, Ezek. xvi. 40. they commonly need not want that, which was the height of *Augur's* wiſh, *food convenient*, Prov. xxx. 8. 'Tis true indeed, if they will fold their hands in their boſom, if with *Solomon's ſluggard*, *they will not plough by reaſon of the cold*, they muſt take his fate in the ſummer, as they have his eaſe in the winter, *they may beg in harveſt, and have nothing*, Prov. xx. 4. But then 'tis viſible they are the authors of their own neceſſities. And indeed to men of ſuch lazy careleſs natures, 'tis hard to ſay, what degree of God's bounty can keep them from want, ſince we often ſee the faireſt fortune's diſſipated, as well by the ſupine negligence, as the riotous prodigality of the owners. And therefore if men will be idle, they

are not to accuſe God, but themſelves, if they be indigent.

11. But then there is one caſe wherein men ſeem more inevitably expoſed, and that is, when by age, ſickneſs, or decrepidneſs, they are diſabled from work, or when their family is too numerous for their work to maintain. And this indeed ſeems that moſt forlorn ſtate of poverty; yet God has provided for them alſo, by aſſigning ſuch perſons to the care of the rich: Nay, he has put an extraordinary mark of favour on them, given them the honour of being his proxies repreſentatives, made them letters of attorney (as it were) to demand relief in his name, and upon his account. And though tis too true, that even that authority will not prevail with many of the rich to open their purſes, yet even in this age of frozen charity, there are ſtill ſome who remember upon what terms they received their wealth, and employ it accordingly. And though the number of them is not ſo great as it were to be wiſhed, yet there are in all parts, ſome ſcattered here and there, like *cities of refuge* in the land, Deut. xix. 2. to which theſe poor diſtreſſed creatures may flee for ſuccour. And I think I may ſay, that between the legal proviſions that are made in this caſe, and voluntary contributions,

there are not very many that want the things that are of abſolute neceſſity: and we know *St. Paul* compriſes thoſe in a ſmall compaſs, *food and raiment*, and propoſes them as ſufficient materials of content, 1 *Tim.* vi. 8. I ſay not this, to contract any man's bowels, or leſſen his compaſſion for ſuch poor wretches. For howmuchſoever they lend, I wiſh as *Joab* did in another caſe to *David*, the Lord *increaſe it an hundred fold*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 3. I only urge it as an evidence of the aſſertion I am to prove, that no man is ſo pretermitted by God, or his diſpoſal of temporals, but that even he that ſeems the moſt abandoned, has a ſhare in his providence, and conſequently cannot juſtly murmur, ſince even this ſtate which is the higheſt inſtance of human indigence, is not without its receivings from God.

12. But the number in this form are but few, compared to thoſe in a higher; for between this and the higheſt affluence, how many intermediate degrees are there, in which men partake not only of the neceſſaries, but comforts of life; that have not only food and raiment, but their diſtinction of holy-day and working-day, fare and appaerel? He that is but one ſtep advanced from beggary has ſo much, he that has got to a ſecond has more than is

ed and extended, is capable of no such satisfaction. When his enjoyments forestall all particular pursuits, and he knows not upon what to fasten his next wish; yet even then he has some confused, uninformed appetites, and thinks himself miserable because he cannot tell what would make him more happy. And yet, this is that envied state which men with so much greediness aspire to. Every man looks on it as the top of felicity, to have nothing more to wish in the world. And yet alas, even that when attained, would be their torment. Let men never think then that contentment is to be caught by long and foreign pursuits; he is likeliest to find it who sits at home, and duly contemplates those blessings which God has brought within his reach, of which every man has a fair proportion, if he will advert to it.

12. For besides these external accessions (of which the meanest have some, the middle sort a great deal, and the uppermost rather too much) man is a principality within himself, and has in his composure so many excellent impresses of his Maker's power and goodness, that he need not ask leave of any exterior thing to be happy, if he knew but right how to value himself: The very meanest part of him,

neceſſary ; and ſo every degree riſes in plenty till it comes to vanity and exceſs : And even there too, there are gradual riſings, ſome having ſo much fewel for luxury, that they are at as great a loſs for invention, as others can be for materials, and complain that there are no further riots left for them to eſſay. How many are there who have ſo cloyed and glutted their ſenſes, that they want ſome other inlets for pleaſure, and with the rich man in the goſpel, are in diſtreſs where to beſtow their abundance !

13. And ſure ſuch as theſe cannot deny that they have received good things, yet generally there are none leſs contented ; which is a clear demonſtration that our repinings proceed not from any defect of bounty in God, but from the malignant temper of our own hearts. And as it is an eaſier thing to ſatisfy the cravings of an hungry, than to curethe nauſeous recoilings of a ſurfeited ſtomach : ſo certainly the diſcontents of the poor are much eaſier allayed than thoſe of the rich. The indigence of the one has contracted his deſires, and has taught him not to look further than a little beyond bare neceſſaries, ſo that a moderate alms ſatisfies, and a liberal, tranſports him : But he who by a perpetual repletion has his deſires ſtretch-

his body, is a piece of admirable workmanſhip, of a moſt incomprehenſible contrivance, as the Pſalmiſt ſays, *He is fearfully and wonderfully made;* and 'tis aſtoniſhing to think of what a ſymetry of parts this beautiful fabric is made up. Nor are they only for ſhew, but uſe; every member, every limb is endowed with a particular faculty to make it ſerviceable to the whole; and in that admirable contexture of veins and arteries, ſinews and muſcles, nerves and tendons, none are ſuperfluous, but ſome way or other contribute to vegetation, ſenſe, or motion. Nay, the moſt noble and moſt uſeful parts are all of them double, not only as a reſerve in caſe of miſadventure of one part; but alſo as an inſtance of the bounty of the donor. And indeed it is obſervable of *Galen* in his writings, that after he had taken great care to exempt himſelf and all of his profeſſion from taking notice of the *Deity*, by ſaying, That to diſcourſe concerning the Gods, was the taſk of ſpeculative philoſophers; yet coming to write *de uſu partium*, and conſidering the frame of human bodies, and therein diſcovering the wonderful contrivance of every part in reference to itſelf, and alſo to the whole; their ſtrength, agility, and various movement, infinitely ſurpaſſing the powers of mechanic engines; he ſeems to have had

the fate we read of Saul in holy ſcripture, and againſt his genius and purpoſe, to become a prophet, breaking frequently out into hymns and ſacred raptures, ſaying, Theſe myſteries are more divine than the *Samothracian* or *Eleuſinian*; and confeſſing they both ſtrictly require, and infinitely excel the low returns of human praiſe. But beyond the fabric of parts as organic, what an extract of wonder are our ſenſes, thoſe *five operations of the Lord*, as the ſon of Sirach rightly (and by way of eminence) ſtiles them *Eccl.* xvii. 5? By theſe we draw all outward objects to ourſelves. What were the beauties of the univerſe to us, if we had not ſight to behold them, or the moſt melodious ſounds, if we had not hearing? and ſo of the reſt. And yet theſe are not only generally given, but alſo preſerved to the greater part of men; and perhaps would be to more, did not our baſe undervaluing of common mercies, force God ſometimes to inſtruct us in their worth. by making us feel what it is to want them.

15. Multitudes of refreſhments God alſo has provided for our bodies, particularly that of ſleep, of which he has been ſo conſiderate, as in his diſtributions of time, to make a ſolemn allotment for it: Yet who almoſt, when he lies down, con-

ſiders the mercy, or when he riſes refreſhed, riſes thankful alſo? But if our reſt at any time be interrupted by the cares of our mind, or pains of our bodies, then and only then, we conſider, that it is *God who gives his beloved ſleep*, Pſal. cxxvii. 2. and think it a bleſſing worth our eſteem. Thus it is with health, ſtrength, and every thing elſe, we deſpiſe it while we have it, and impatiently deſire it whilſt we have it not, but in the mean time ſure we cannot complain, that God's hand is ſhortened towards us, when in the ordinary courſe of his providence we commonly enjoy theſe mercies many years, which we find ſo much want of, if they be withdrawn but for a few hours. And indeed, there is not a greater inſtance of human corruption than our ſenſeleſs contempt of bleſſings, merely becauſe they are cuſtomary; which in true reaſon is an argument why we ſhould prize them the more. When we deal with men, we diſcern it well enough, he that gives me once an hundred pounds, I account not ſo much my benefactor, as if he made it my annual revenue; yet God muſt loſe his thanks, by multiplying his favors; and his benefits grow more inviſible by their being always before us.

16. But the body (with its enjoyment)

is but the loweſt inſtance of God's bounty, 'tis but a decent caſe for that ineſtimable jewel he has put in it: The ſoul, like the ark, is the thing for which this whole tabernacle was framed, and that is a ſpark of divinity in which alone it is that God accompliſhed his deſign of *making man in his own image*, Gen. 1. 26. It would be too long to attempt an exact ſurvey of its particular excellencies. The mere intellectual powers wherewith it is endued, have exerciſed the curioſity, and raiſed the admiration of the great contemplations of nature in all ages; yet after all, of ſo ſubtile compoſure is the ſoul, that it is inſcrutable even to itſelf: And thongh the ſimpleſt man knows he has the faculties of imagination, apprehenſion, memory, reflection; yet the moſt learned cannot aſſign where they are ſeated, or by what means they operate. It is enough to us that we have them, and many excellent uſes for them; one whereof (and a moſt neceſſary one) is a thankful reflection on the goodneſs of God who gave them. He might have made us in the very loweſt form of creatures, inſenſible ſtocks or ſtones; or if he had advanced us a ſtep higher, he might have fixed us among mere animals, made us perhaps of the noxious, at beſt of the tamer ſort of beaſts; but he has placed us in the higheſt rank

of visible creatures, and not only given us *dominion over the works of his hands*, Psal. viii. 6. but has given reason wherewith to manage that sovereignty, without which we had only been the more masterly sort of brutes.

17. Yet still the soul is to be considered in a higher notion, than of its immortality and capacity of endless bliss: And here indeed it owns its extraction, and is an image of the first Being, whose felicity is co-existent with himself; this, as it is the most transcendent accomplishment of nature, so it is most universal. Whatever disparity there may be between man and man in other respects, yet in this all are equal. The poor beggar at the gate has a soul as capacious of eternal happiness as his whose crumbs he begs for, (nay sometimes better prepared for it, as that parable shews, *Luke* xvi. 11.) And tho' the dignities of earth are the prize of the rich and noble, the subtle and designing, yet heaven is as easily mounted from the dunghill as the throne: and an honest simplicity will sooner bring us thither than the Machiavelian policy. Nay God has not only designed us to so glorious an end, but has done all on his part to secure us of it; sent his Son to lead us the way, his Spirit to quicken us in it. We need not

diſpute how univerſal this is; it is ſure it concerns all to whom I am now ſpeaking, thoſe that are within the pale of the church: And if it ſhould prove confined only to them, the more peculiar is their obligation, and are thus ſingled from the reſt of the world, and the greater ought to be their thankfulneſs. The heathen Philoſopher made it matter of his ſolemn acknowledgment to fortune, that he was born a Grecian and not a Barbarian: And ſure the advantages of our Chriſtianity are of a much higher ſtrain, and ought to be infinitely more celebrated. The Apoſtle we find often applauding this glorious privilege, as that which makes us *fellow-citizens with the ſaints, and of the houſhold of God*, Epheſ. iii. 19. Nay, which elevates us to a higher ſtate, *the adoption of ſons*, Gal. iv. 5. Not only ſons, but *heirs alſo with God, and joint heirs of Chriſt*, Rom. viii. 17. And what ambition is there ſo greedy which this will not ſatisfy? Yet this is our common ſtate, the birth-right of our regeneration, if we not degrade ourourſelves, and with *Eſau* ſell our title.

18. And now methinks every man may interrogate himſelf in the ſame form wherein *Jonadab* did *Amnon*, 2 Sam. xiii. 4. *Why art thou, being the king's ſon, thus lean from day to day?* Why ſhould a per-

ſon adopted by the King of kings, thus languiſh and pine? What is there below the ſun worthy his notice, much leſs deſires, that hath a kingdom above it? Certainly did we but know how to eſtimate ourſelves upon this account, it were impoſſible for us, with ſuch ſordid condeſcenſions, to court every petty worldly intereſt, and ſo impatiently vex ourſelves when we cannot attain it. Alas! how unworthily do we bear the names of Chriſtians, when that which carried the forefathers of our faith through the moſt fiery trials, cannot ſupport us under the diſappointment of any exrtavagant deſire? They had ſuch *reſpect to the recompence of the reward*, Heb. xi. 26. as made them cheerfully expoſe their fame to ignominy, their goods to rapine, their bodies to the moſt exquiſite tortures, and their lives to death. Yet the ſame hopes cannot work us to any tolerable degree of patience, when we ſuffer the ſmalleſt diminution of any of theſe. What ſhall we ſay? Is heaven grown leſs valuable, or earth more than it was then? No ſurely, but we are more infatuated in our eſtimates, we have ſo long abetted the rivalry of the handmaid, that the miſtreſs, like *Sarah*, appears deſpicable. Like *Jonah* we ſit down ſullen upon the withering of a gourd, never conſidering that God has provided

us a better ſhelter, *a building of God eternal in the heavens*, 2 Cor. v. 1. Indeed, there can be no temporal deſtitution ſo great, which ſuch an expectation cannot make ſupportable. Were we in *Job's* condition, ſitting upon a dunghill, and ſcraping ourſelves with a potſheard, yet as long as we can ſay with him, *Our Redeemer liveth*, Job xix. 25. we have all reaſon to ſay with him alſo, *Bleſſed be the name of the* LORD, Job, i. 21. What a madneſs is it then for us to expoſe ourſelves to be pierced and wounded by every temporal adverſity, who have ſo impenetrable an armour? Nay, what an ungrateful reproach is it to that goodneſs of God, to ſhew that we cannot make him a counterpoiſe to the moſt trivial ſecular ſatisfaction? on which account ſure he may again take up that exprobating complaint we find in the Prophet, *A goodly price that I was valued at of them*, Zac. xi. 13.

19. But how mean ſoever he is in our eyes, though Chriſt ſeem the ſame to us in his glory which he did in his abaſement, to have no beauty that we ſhould deſire him; yet he puts another rate upon himſelf, and tells us, *That he that loves father or mother, ſon or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me*, Matth. x. 37. Now our love and our joy are paſſions coinci-

dent, and therefore whatever we joy more in than we do in him, we may be presumed to love better; and if he cannot endure the competition of those more ingenuous objects of our love, he there mentions, how will he suffer that of our vanities, or childish wanton appetites? and yet those are the things after which we so impatiently rave. For I believe I may truly affirm, that if there were a scrutiny made into all the discontents of mankind, for one that were fastened upon any great considerable calamity, there are many that are founded only in the irregularity of our own desires.

20. By what has been said we may justly conclude in the Prophet's phrase, *God hath not been to us a wilderness, a land of darkness*, Jer. ii. 31. but has graciously dispensed to us in all our interests. Yet the instances here given are only common, such as relate to all, or at least the far greater part of mankind: But what volumes might be made, should every man set down his own particular experiences of mercy? In that case it would be no extravagant hyperbole we find, John xxii. 25. *That even the world itself could not contain the books which should be written*, God knows our memories are very frail, and our observations slight in this point; yet

abſtracting from all the forgotten or neglected favors, what vaſt catalogues may every man make to himſelf, if he would but recollect, what effects he has had of God's bounty in giving, of his providence in protecting, of his grace in reſtraining and exciting of his patience in forbearing? And certainly all theſe productions of the divine goodneſs were never deſigned to die in the birth. The Pſalmiſt will tell us, *The Lord has ſo done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance*, Pſal. cxi. 3. Let every man then make it his daily care to recount to himſelf the wonders God hath done, as for the children of men in general, ſo for himſelf in particular. When the Iſraelites murmured under the bondage, *Pharaoh* imputes it to their idleneſs and preſcribes them more work, as the readieſt cure: a piece indeed of inhuman tyranny in him, but may with equity and ſucceſs be practiſed by us upon ourſelves. When we find our appetites mutinous, complaining of our preſent condition, let us ſet ourſelves to recollect the many inſtances of God's mercies. And ſurely if we do it ſincerely, and with intention, we cannot have paſt through half our ſtages, before our ſullen murmurs will be beat out of countenance, and retire with ſhame, when they are confronted with

ſuch a cloud of witneſſes, ſuch ſignal teſtimonies of God's goodneſs to us: For when we have muſtered up all our little grievances, moſt critically examined all our wants, we ſhall find them very unproportionable to our comforts, and to our receivings; in which comparative notion, the next ſection is to conſider them.

God's bounty's great, his mercy ſure;
Let none repine howe'er oppreſt,
His truth for ever will endure,
His Saints in him may ſure'y reſt.

Great God give me my daily bread,
And what thou ſeeſt good for me:
For by JEHOVAH *we are fed,*
Let all the world ſing praiſe to thee.

Sect. IV.

Of the Surpluſage of our Enjoyments above our Sufferings.

TO regulate our eſtimate of thoſe things which we either enjoy or ſuffer, there are three precedent queries to be made: The firſt of their number or plenty, the ſecond of their weight, the third of their conſtancy and continuance; for according as they partake more of theſe properties, every good is more good, and every evil is more evil. It will therefore be our beſt method of trial in the preſent caſe, to compare our bleſſings and our calamities in theſe three reſpects.

2. And firſt in part of plenty, the mercies of God are the ſource of all our good, are ſet out to us in holy ſcripture in the moſt ſupurlative ſtrain. They are *multitude*, Pſal. cii. 20. *Plentious redemption*, Pſal. cxxx. 7. *As high as the heaven*, Pſal. ciii. 11. *He fills all things living with plenteouſneſs*, Pſal. cxlv. 16. His mercies indeed are ſuch as come not within the compaſs of number, but ſtretch themſelves to infinity; and are beſt repreſented by ſuch a calculation as God made to Abraham, when he ſhewed

him the numerouſneſs of his poſterity by the innumerableneſs of the ſtars, Gen. xv. 5. Were there but a ſingle mercy apportioned to each minute of our lives, the ſum would ariſe very high: But how is our arithmetic confounded, when every minute has more than we can diſtinctly number? for beſides the original ſtock mentioned in the laſt ſection, and the acceſſion of new bounty, the giving us ſomewhat which we had not before; what an accumulative mercy is it, the preſerving what we have? we are made up of ſo many pieces, we have ſuch variety of intereſts, ſpiritual, temporal, public and private; for ourſelves, our friends, and dependants, that it is not a confuſed general regard that will keep all theſe in ſecurity one moment. We are like a vaſt building, which coſts as much to maintain as to erect. And indeed conſidering the corruptibleneſs of our materials, our preſervation is no leſs a work of omnipotence, than our firſt forming: Nay perhaps it is rather a greater. Our original clay though it had no aptneſs, yet it had no averſion to the receiving a human form; but was in the hand of the potter to make it what he pleaſed: But we now have principles of decay within us, which vehemently tend to diſſolution; we want the ſupplies of ſeveral things without us, the failing where-

of return us again to our duſt. Nay we do not only need the aid, but we fear the hoſtility of outward things. That every air which ſometimes refreſhes us, may at another ſtarve & freeze us; that which warms and comforts, has alſo a power of conſuming us. Yea that very meat which nouriſhes, may choak and ſtifle us. In a word, there is no creature ſo deſpicable, ſo inconſiderable, which may not ſometimes ſerve, and which may not at any time (if God permit) ruin us. Now, whence is it that we ſo conſtantly, ſo frequently find the good, the benign efficacy of theſe things, and ſo ſeldom, ſo rarely the evil? Whence I ſay is it, but from the active unwearied providence, which draws forth the better properties of the creatures for our uſe, and reſtrains the worſer for our ſecurity? which with a particular advertence watches not only over every perſon, but over every ſeveral concern of that perſon. And how aſtoniſhing a contemplation is this? If the mere ebbing and flowing of the ſea, put the Philoſopher into ſuch an ecſtacy, that he flung himſelf into it, becauſe he could not comprehend the inſcrutable cauſe of it; in what perpetual raptures of admiration may we be, who have every minute within us, and about us more and greater wonders, and thoſe too in our favor,

when we deſerve rather the divine power ſhould exert itſelf into our deſtruction?

3. But alas! our danger from the viſible creature, is little compared with thoſe from the ſpirits of darkneſs. *We wreſtle not only with fleſh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with ſpiritual wickedneſs*, &c. Epheſ. vi. 12. So inveterate is the enmity between the ſerpent and the ſeed of the woman in general, that he watches all advantages againſt us, not only in our ſouls, but even our bodies, our goods, and in every part of our concerns. Thus we ſee he not only aſſaulted *Job's* ſoul, by the wicked inſinuations of his wife, (with more effect) his body with boils and ſores, his poſſeſſions by the *Chaldeans* and *Sabeans*, and the images of himſelf, his deareſt children, by a wind from the wilderneſs, Job i. And can we think his malice is now worn out? No ſurely, he ſtill wiſhes as ill to mankind as ever, and we ſhould ſoon ſee the woful effects of it, did not the ſame power which let looſe for *Job's* trial, reſtrain him for our ſafety. Nay, had he but power to affright, though not to hurt us, even that would make our lives very uncomfortable. We cannot hear the relation of ſprights or apparitions, but our blood chills upon it,

and a horror runs through our veins: What ſhould we then do if he ſhould make his night-walks through our chamber, and with his illuſory terrors diſturb our reſt? Yet all this and much more he would do, if God did not chain up this *old dragon*, Rev. xx. Nay, if he were not at the expence of a guard about us, and thoſe no leſs than angels. I ſhall not diſpute whether every perſon hath not his peculiar guardian: For though many have not improbably aſſerted it, we have ground enough of acquieſcence in the general affirmation of the Apoſtle, *That they are all miniſtering ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them, who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation*, Heb. i. 14. And now if the reader pleaſe to ſum up how many are his concerns, and how many are the dangers await him in them all, he cannot ſure render the account of thoſe mercies which preſerve the one, and divert the other, in any other phraſe than that of the pſalmiſt, *They are more than I am able to expreſs*, Pſal. xl. 5.

4. We may now challenge the moſt miſerable or the moſt querelous man living, to produce cauſes of complaint, proportionable to thoſe of thanſgiving. He that has the greateſt ſtock of calamities, can never vie with the heaps of benefits; the diſproportion is greater than that of the

armies of *Ahab and Benhadad*, 1 Kings, xx. 27. whereof the one was like *two little flocks of kids*, the other *filled the country*. God has told us that he *afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men*, Lam. iii. 33. whereas on the contrary, he *delighteth in mercy*, Micah vii. 18. We may judge by ourſelves which he is likelieſt often to repeat, thoſe acts which he doth with regret and reluctancy, or thoſe which he does with pleaſure and delight. But we need no inferences where we have the atteſtation of experience. Let every man therefore make this his judge in this caſe, let him every night recollect, how many things within and about him he is concerned in, and conſider how many of thoſe have been preſerved entire to him, ſtill accounting every thing ſo continued as a new donation. If he begin with his Spiritual ſtate, 'tis too poſſible he may ſometimes find he has loſt his innocence, committed ſome, perhaps many ſins: But even in theſe he will find cauſe to juſtify God, if he do but recollect with what inward checks and admonitions, and outward reſtraints, God has endeavored to bridle him. If he will break through thoſe fences, that does not at all derogate from the mercy of God which ſo guarded him, but it rather illuſtrates his goodneſs, that after ſo many quenchings of his ſpi-

rit, does yet continue its influence. So that even he that has the moſt deplorably violated his integrity, is yet to confeſs that God's purpoſe was to have preſerved it entire; and he might really ſo have kept it, had he complied with thoſe aids which were afforded him. But in temporal concerns we are not ſo apt to undermine ourſelves, and therefore ſhall much more rarely find we have ſuffered detriment in them, that in our ſpiritual; but are there ordinarily like to meet with a better account. Let a man therefore conſider what is lacking to him of all the ſecular good things he had in the morning, and tell me whether for the moſt part he may not give ſuch an account, as the Iſraelitiſh officers did of their men, after the ſlaughter of the *Midinnites*, *That he hath not loſt one*, Numb. xxxi. 39. Or if ſometimes he do ſuffer a diminution, yet at the worſt he will find that many more good things have been preſerved to him, than have been taken from him. A man may perhaps meet with ſome damage in his eſtate, yet 'tis manifold odds that that damage is but partial, and that he has ſtill more left than is loſt. Or if it be more entire, yet if he have his health, his limbs, his ſenſes, his friends, and all things beſide his eſtate left him, ſo that for one thing he has loſt, he ſtill retains

a multitude, he may ſay of it as the diſciples of the few loaves, *What is this among ſo many*, Matth. xiv. 17. *Ariſtippus* being bemoaned for the loſe of a farm, replied with ſome ſharpneſs upon his condoler, You have but one field, and I have yet three left, why ſhould I not rather grieve for you? Intimating that a man is not ſo much to eſtimate what ha has loſt, as what he has left. A piece of wiſdom which if he wolud tranſcribe, we might quickly convince ourſelves, that even in our moſt adverſe eſtate there are as *Elijah* ſpeaks, *More with us than againſt us*, 2 Rings vi. 16. that our enjoyments are more than our ſufferings, and God's acts of grace do far out-number thoſe of his ſeverity.

5. And as they do out-number, ſo alſo do they outweigh them. The mercies we receive from God are (as the laſt ſection has ſhewed) of the greateſt importance; the moſt ſubſtantial ſolid goods; and the greateſt of all, I mean thoſe which concern our eternal ſtate, are ſo firmly fixed on us, that unleſs we will voluntarily quit our claim, 'tis not in the power of men or devils to defeat us. Light bodies are eaſily blown away by every guſt of wind, but this *weight of glory*, as the Apoſtle calls it, 2 Cor. iv. 17. conti-

nues firm and ſtable, is proof againſt all ſtorms, like the *ſhadow of a great rock in a weary land*, Iſa. xxxii. 2. Thoſe dark ſketches we have of it, might have ſerved to refreſh and deceive the tedioufneſs of our pilgrimage, and therefore the moſt formidable calamities of this life are below all meaſures of compariſon with this hope of our calling, this *riches of the glory of our inheritance*, Eph. iii. 16. The heavieſt and moſt preſſing of our afflictions are to that, *but like the ſmall duſt of the balance*, Iſa. xl. 15. ſo that it we ſhould here ſtop our inquiſition, we have a ſufficient reſolution of the preſent queſtion, and muſt conclude, that God has given us an abundant counterpoiſe of all, we either do or can ſuffer here.

6. If therefore ther be any ſo forlorn as to temporals, that he can fetch thence no evidence of God's fatherly care of him, yet this one conſideration may ſolve his doubts, and convince him that he is not abdicated by him. We read of no gifts *Abraham* gave *Iſaac*, yet to the ſons of the concubines 'tis ſaid he did, Gen. xxv. 6. It had been a very fallacious inference, if *Iſaac* ſhould have concluded himſelf neglected, becauſe his far great porertion was but in reverſions. And it will the ſame in any of us, if we argue an unkindneſs

from any temporal wants who have the entail of an eternal inheritance. But surely *God does not leave himself without witness*, Acts xiv. 17. even in secular things; there is no man breathing but has some blessings of his left hand, as well as his right, as I have already mentioned: and unless it be some few prodigies of calamity, in whose punishment or patience God designs signally to glorify himself, there are none who enjoy not greater comforts of life than those they want, I mean such as are really greater, though perhaps, to their prejudicate fancies they do not appear so. Thus in point of health, if a man be disaffected in one part, yet all the rest of his body may be (and often is) well; or if he have a complication, and have more than one disease, yet there is no man that has all, or half so many as are incident to human bodies, so that he is comparatively more healthy than sick. So again it is not very common for a man to lose a limb, or sense; the generality of them keep them to their last; and they who do, have in that an overbalance to most outward adversities; and even they who are so unhappy to lose one, yet commonly keep the rest, at least the major part: or if at any time any man is left a mere breathing trunk, yet it is by such stupifying diseases as deaden the senses, or such mortal ones as soon take them away; and

ſo the remedy overtakes the malady. Beſides it pleaſes God very often to make compenſation for the want of one member or faculty by improving the uſe of another. We have ſeen feet ſupply all the neceſſary uſes of hands, to thoſe that have had none; and it is a thing of daily obſervation that men that are blind, have their intellects more vigorous and active, by their abſtractions from viſible objects.

7. Thus alſo it is in the matter of wealth; he that is forced to get his bread by the ſweat of his brows, 'tis true he cannot have thoſe delicacies wherewith rich men abound, yet his labor helps him to a more poignant, more ſavoury ſauce than a whole college of epicures can compound. His hunger gives a higher guſt to his dry cruſt, than the ſurfeited ſtomach can find in the moſt coſtly, moſt elaborate mixture: So verifying the obſervation of *Solomon*, *The full ſoul loatheth the honey-comb, but to the hungry ſoul every bitter thing is ſweet*, Prov. xxvii. 7. He cannot *indeed ſtretch himſelf upon his bed of ivory*, Amos vi. 4. yet his ſleeps are ſounder than thoſe that can. The wiſe-man tells us, and experience does ſo too, that *the ſleep of a laboring man is ſweet*, Eccleſ. v. 12. He is not clothed gorgeouſly, has not the ſplendor of glittering apparel, ſo neither has he

the care of contriving it, the fears of being foreſtalled in a new invention, or any of thoſe unmanly ſolicitudes which attend that vanity. He has the proper gennine uſe of clothing, the preventing ſhame and cold, and is happily determined to that which the wiſer men of the world have voluntarily choſen. To conclude, he has one advantage beyond all theſe; his neceſſities reſcue him from idleneſs, and all its conſequent temptations; which is ſo great a benefit, that if rich men be not their own taſk-maſters, as his wants are his, if they do not provide themſelves of buſineſs, that one want of theirs is infinitely more deplorable than all his; and he is not only happy comparatively with himſelf, in having better things than he wants, but with them alſo.

8. If we come now to reputation and fame, the account will be much the ſame, he that is eminent in the world for ſome great atchievement, is ſet up as an object of every man's remark; when as his excellencies on one hand are viſible, ſo his faults and blemiſhes are on the other. And as human frailty makes it too probable, theſe latter will be really more, ſo human envy makes it ſure that they ſhall be more preciſely, more curiouſly obſerved, and more loudly blazoned. So that up-

on the whole, a good quiet ſecurity, tho' it be not the road to glory, yet is the likelieſt fence againſt infamy. And indeed, he that can keep up the repute of a ſober integrity within his own private ſphere, need not envy the triumphant ſallies of others, which often meet with a fatal turn at the latter end of the day. But it will be ſaid that even that more moderate ſort of reputation is not every man's portion, but that many lie under great ignominy and ſcandal. I ſhall here aſk whether theſe be juſt or unjuſt? If they be juſt they belong not to our preſent ſubject, which relates only to thoſe inflictions which are the effects of God's immediate providence, not of our own crimes: For I never doubted but that by thoſe we may diveſt ourſelves of any, nay of all the good things God has deſigned us. But if the obloquy be unjuſt, 'tis probable that 'tis taken up only by ill men, and that the good paſs a more equitable ſentence; and then ſurely the atteſtation of a few ſuch, is able to outweigh a mutlitude of the others. And in this caſe a man may only find patience but pleaſure in reproaches. *Socrates* looked with trouble and jealouſy on himſelf when ill men commended him, ſaying, What ill have I done? and ſure a Chriſtian has a farther reaſon to be pleaſed with their revilings, they being

his ſecurity againſt the *two* pronounced to thoſe *whom all men ſpeak well of*, Luke vi. 26. But ſometimes it happens, that even good men are ſeduced and either by the artifices of the wicked, or their own too haſty credulity, give credit to unjuſt reports. And this I confeſs is a ſharp trial to the injured perſon, yet even this cannot often be univerſal; there can ſcarce be any innocence ſo forlorn but that there may be opportunities of clearing it to ſome or other, and by them propagating it to more, and if the cloud ever come to be diſperſed, their fame will appear with the brighter luſtre. But if none of this happen, they have yet a certain and more bleſſed retreat, even an appeal to the unerring Judge, who never beholds us with more approbation, that when we are under the unjuſt condemnation of men. Indeed we have then a double tie upon him, not only his juſtice but his pity is concerned in our cauſe. God particularly owns himſelf as the refuge of the oppreſſed, and there is ſcarce a ſharper and more ſenſible oppreſſion than this of calumny; Yet even this proves an advantage, whilſt it procures God's immediate patronage, makes us the objects of his more peculiar care and compaſſion, who can *make our righteonſneſs as clear as the light*, Pſal. xxxvii. 6. if he ſee it fit; but if in his wiſdom he

chuſe not that for us, 'tis comfort enough for vs thas we have approved it to him. It was *Elkanah's* queſtion to *Hannah* in her diſconſolation, *Am not I better to thee than ten ſods?* 1 Sam. i. 8. And ſure we ſay the like of God's approbation, that it is better to us, I ſay not than ten, but ten thouſand encomiums of men. They very echo of it in the teſtimony of a good conſcience is an unſpeakable comfort, and this voice ſounds more audibly, more ſweetly, among the loudeſt, the harſheſh accuſations of men. So that we ſee even this aſſault too is not without its guard, and theſe *waters of Marah*, Exod. xv. 23. may be rendered not only wholeſome, but pleaſant.

I have now inſtanced in the three moſt general concerns of human life, the body, goods, and fame, to which heads may be reduced moſt of the afflictions incident to our outward ſtate, as far as immediately concern ourſelves. But their is no man ſtands ſo ſingle in the world, but has ſome relations or friends, in which he thinks himſelf intereſted, and many times thoſe obliqne ſtrokes which wound us through them, are as painful as the more direct; yet here alſo God is ordinarily pleaſed to provide ſome allays, if we would but take notice of

them. He who has had one friend die, has ordinarily divers others ſurviving; or if he have not that, uſually God raiſes him up others. 'Tis true we cannot have a ſucceſſion of fathers and mothers, yet we often have of other friends that are no leſs helpful to us: And indeed there are ſcarce in any thing more remarkable evidences of Providence, than in this particular. *He that is able out of ſtones to raiſe up children to Abraham*, Matth. iii. 9. does many times by as unexpected a production ſupply friends to the deſolate. But we do ſometimes loſe our friends while they are living, they withdraw their kindneſs which is the ſoul of friendſhip: And if this happen by our own demerit, we can accuſe neither God nor them for it; nor can we rationally expect that God will provide ſupplies, when we wilfully deſpoil ourſelves. But when they are unkind without provocation, then is the ſeaſon for his interpoſition, who uſes to take up *thoſe whom father and mother forſake*, Pſal. xxvii. 10. And we frequently ſee ſignal proofs of his care in exciting the compaſſions of other friends and relatives, or perhaps of mere ſtrangers. Nay ſometimes God makes the inhumanity of a man's relations, the occaſion of his advantage. Thus the barbarous malice of

Joſeph's brethren was the firſt ſtep to his dominion over Egypt. And it is a common obſervation in families, that the moſt diſcountenanced child oft makes better proof, than the darling.

10. We are yet liable to a third affliction by the calamity of our friends, which by the ſympathy of kindneſs preſſes us no leſs (perhaps more) ſenſibly than our own: But then it is to be conſidered, that theirs are capable of the ſame allaying circumſtances that ours are, and God has the ſame arts of alleviating their burdens; ſo that we have the ſame arguments for acquieſcence in their ſufferings that we have in our own, and ſhall do a more friendly office in impreſſing thoſe upon them, than in the moſt paſſionate adopting their ſorrows.

11. The laſt and greateſt diſcomfort from friends, is that of that of their own: And if ever we may be allowed that diſconſolate ſtrain of the Prophet, Iſa. xxii. 4. *Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me;* this ſeems to be the time: Yet even this *valley of Achor is not without a door of hope*, Hoſ. ii. 15. A vicious perſon may be recalled, multitudes have been; ſo that as long as God continues life, we ought no more to de-

poſite our hope than to quit our endeavour. Beſides there are few that make this complaint that have not ſomething to balance, or at leaſt to lighten it. I ſhall inſtance in that relation which is the neareſt and moſt tender, that of a parent. He that has one bad child may have divers good. If he have but one virtuous it is a very great mercy, and it is another that he may be the better taught to value it by the oppoſition of the contrary. But if any be ſo unhappy as to have many children, and *all to conſume his eyes and grieve his heart*, 2 Sam. ii. 33. it may be a ſeaſonable reflection for him to examine how far he has contributed to it, either by *Eli*'s fond indulgence, or by a remiſs and careleſs education; or which is worſt of all, by his moſt impious example. If any, or all of thoſe be found the cauſe, he is not ſo much to ſeek for allays to his grief, as for pardon of his ſin: And when he has penitently retracted his own fault, he may then have better ground of hope that God may reform thoſe of his children. In the mean time he may look on his own affliction in them as God's diſcipline on him, and gather at leaſt this comfort from it, that his heavenly Father has more care of him, than he had of his; and does not leave him uncorrected.

12. Thus we see in all the concerns (which are the most common and important of human life, and wherein the justest of our complaints are usually founded) there is such a temperature and mixture, that the good does more than equal the ill, and not only in the grosser bulk, when our whole state is weighed together, but in every single branch of it; God having herein dealt with this little world man, as he has done with the greater, wherein he is observed to have furnished every country with specific remedies for their peculiar diseases. I have only given these short hints by way of essay and pattern for the Reader's contemplation, which when he shall have extended to all those minute particulars wherein he is especially concerned, more curiously compared his sufferings with his allays and comforts, I cannot doubt but he will own himself an instance of the truth of the present thesis, and confess, that he has much more cause of thankfulness than complaint.

13. This I say, supposing his afflictions to be of those more solid and considerable sorts I have before mentioned. But how many are there who have few or none of such, who seem to be seated in the land of Goshen, in a place exempt from all the

plagues that infect their neighbours? And thoſe, one would think, ſhould give a ready vote to this concluſion, as having no temptation to reſiſt it; yet I doubt it is far otherwiſe, that ſuch men are of all the moſt unſatisfied. For though they have no croſſes of God's impoſing, they uſually create a multitude to themſelves. And here we may ſay with *David*, *It is better to fall into the hand of God, than into the hand of man*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. It is eaſier to bear the afflictions God ſends, than thoſe we make to ourſelves. His are limited both for quantity and quality, but our own are as boundleſs as thoſe extravagant deſires from which they ſpring.

14. And this is the true cauſe why Contentment is ſo much a ſtranger to thoſe who have all the outward cauſes of it, they have no definite meaſure of their deſires; it is not the ſupply of all their real wants will ſerve their turn, their appetites are precarious, and depend upon contingencies. They hunger not becauſe they are empty, but becauſe others are full. Many a man could have liked his own portion well enough, had he not ſeen another have ſomething he liked better. Nay even the moſt inconſiderable things,

acquire a value by being anothers, when we despise much greater of our own. *Ahab* might well have satisfied himself with the kingdom of *Israel*, had not *Naboth*'s poor plot lain in his eye: But so raving were his desires after it, that he disrelishes all the pomps of a crown, yea the ordinary refreshment of nature, can *eat no bread*, till he have that to furnish him with sallads, 1 Kings xxi. 2. And how many are there now at this day whose clothes fit uneasy, if they see another have had but the luck to be a little more ingeniously vain; whose meat is unsavoury if they have seen but a greater rarity, a newer cookery at another's table; in a word, who make other peoples excesses the standard of their own felicities.

15. Nor are our appetites only excited thus by our outward objects, but precipitated and hurried on by our inward lusts. The proud man so longs for homage and adoration, that nothing can please him if that be wanting. *Haman* can find no gust in all the sensualities of the *Persian* court, because a poor despicable *Jew* denies his obeisance, Esth. v. 13. The lustful so impatiently pursues his impure designs, that any difficulty he meets in them, makes him pine and languish like *Amnon*, who could no way recover his own health

but by violating his ſiſter's honour, 2 Sam. xiii. 14. The revengeful labours under an hydropic thirſt till he have the blood of his enemy: All the liquor of *Abſalom*'s ſheep-ſheering could not quench his, without the ſlaughter of his brother, 2 Sam. xiii. 29. And thus every one of our paſſions keeps us upon the rack till they have obtained their deſigns. Nay when they have, the very emptineſs of thoſe acquiſitions is a new torment, and puts us upon freſh purſuits. Thus between the impetuouſneſs of our deſires, and the emptineſs of our enjoyments, we ſtill *diſquiet ourſelves in vain*, Pſal. xxxix. 6. And whilſt we have ſuch cruel taſk-maſters, it is not ſtrange to find us groaning under our burdens. If we will indulge all our vicious or fooliſh appetites, think our lives bound up with them, and ſolicit the ſatisfaction of them with as impatient a vehemence, as *Rachel* did for children, Gen. xxx. 1. *Give me them or I die;* no wonder that we are always complaining of diſappointments, ſince in theſe the very ſucceſs is a defeat, and is but the exchanging the pain of a craving ravenous ſtomach, for that of a cloyed and nauſeated. Indeed men of this temper condemn themſelves to a perpetual reſtleſsneſs, they are like phantaſtic mutineers, who when their ſuperiors ſend them blanks to write their

own conditions, know not what will please them: And even Omnipotence itself cannot satisfy these till it have new moulded them, and reduced their desires to a certainty.

16. But in the mean time how unjustly do they accuse God of illiberality, because every thing answers not their humour? He has made them reasonable creatures, and has provided them satisfactions proportionable to their nature; but if they will have wild irrational expectations, neither his wisdom, nor his goodness is concerned to satisfy those. His supplies are real and solid, and therefore have no correspondence to imaginary wants. If we will create such to ourselves, why do we not create an imaginary satisfaction to them? It were the merrier frenzy of the two, to be like the mad *Athenian*, that thought all the ships that came into the harbour his own: And it were better, *Ixion* like, to have our arms filled with a cloud, than to have them perpetually beating our own breasts, and be still tormenting ourselves with insatiable desires. Yet this is the state to which men voluntarily subject themselves, and then quarrel at God because they will not let themselves be happy. But sure their very complaints justify God, and argue that

he has dealt very kindly with them, and afforded them all the neceſſary accommodations of life: For did they want them, they would not be ſo ſenſible of the want of the other. He that is at perfect eaſe may feel with ſome vexation the biting of a flea or gnat, which would not be at all obſervable if he were upon the rack. And ſhould God change the ſcene, and make theſe nice people feel the deſtitution of neceſſaries; all theſe regrets about ſuperfluities would be overwhelmed. In the mean time how deplorable a thing is it, that we are ſtill the poorer for God's bounty, that thoſe to whom he has opened his hand wideſt, ſhould open their mouth ſo too, in outcries and murmurs? For I think I may ſay, that generally, thoſe that are the fartheſt removed from want, are ſo from content too; they take no notice of all the real ſubſtantial bleſſings they enjoy, leave theſe (like the ninety-nine ſheep in the wilderneſs) forgotten and neglected, to go in queſt after ſome fugitive ſatisfaction, which like a ſhadow flies ſtill faſter in proportion to their purſuit.

17. And now would God they could be recalled from this unprofitable chace, and inſtead of the horſeleaches note, *Give, give*, Prov. xxx. 14. take up that of the

Pſalmiſt, *What ſhall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?* Pſal. cxvi. 12. Let them count how many valuable or rather ineſtimable things they have received from his mercy, and then confront them with thoſe corrections they have found from his juſtice; and if they do this impartially, I doubt not they will find wherewithal to check their higheſt mutinies; and will join with me in confeſſing, that their good things abundantly outweigh their ill.

13. If now we carry on the compariſon to the laſt circumſtance, and conſider the conſtancy, we ſhall find as wide a difference. Let us take the Pſalmiſt's teſtimony, and there will appear a very diſtant date of his mercies and puniſhments. *His mercies endure for ever*, Pſal. cxxxvi. 1. whereas his wrath *endures but the twinkling of an eye*, Pſal. xxx. 5. And accordingly God owns his acts of ſeverity as his *ſtrange work*, Iſr. xxvii. 21. that which he reſorts to only upon ſpecial emergencies; but his mercies *are renewed every morning*, Lam. iii. 23. and doubtleſs we may all upon trial affirm the ſame. There are many of the moſt neceſſary comforts of life which do not only ſometimes viſit us as gueſts, but dwell with us as inmates and domeſtics. How many are there who

have lived in a perpetual affluence from their cradles to their graves, have never known what it is to want? And though the goods of fortune are perhaps leſs conſtant to ſome, yet the refreſhments of nature are uſually ſo to all. We eat and drink, we ſleep, we recreate, we converſe in a continued circle, and go our round as conſtantly as the ſun does. Or if God does ſometimes a little interrupt us in it, put ſome ſhort reſtraint upon our refreſhments, yet that comparatively to the time we enjoy them, is but proportionable to the ſtop he has ſometimes made of the ſun, Joſh. x. 13, 2 Kings xx. 9. or of the ſea, Exod. xiv. 21. which as they were no ſubverſions to the courſe of nature, ſo neither are thoſe ſhort pauſes he ſometimes makes, a repeal of thoſe fixed and cuſtomary benefits his providence uſually allots us. But who is there can ſay that any one of his afflictions has been of equal continuance, or has preſſed him with ſo few intermiſſions? Perhaps he may have miſſed ſome few nights ſleep; but what is that to a twelve-month's, or perhaps a whole life's enjoying it? It is poſſible his ſtomach and his meat have not always been ready together; but how much oftener have they met to his delight? and generally thoſe things that are moſt uſeful, are but rarely interrupted. Nay, to

a great many even the delicacies of life are no less constant, and their luxuries are as daily as their bread; whereas unless their vices or their fancies create uneasinesses to them, those that come immediately from God's hand, make long intermissions and short stays. Yet for all this they that should measure by the incessantness of men's complaints, would judge that the scene was quite reversed, and that our good things are as *Job* speaks, *swifter than a weaver's shuttle*, Job vii. 6. whilst our ill, like *Gehazy's* leprosy *cleave inseparably to us*, 2 Kings v. 27.

19. The truth is, we will not ourselves enjoy those intervals God allows us, but when a calamity does retire, we will still keep it in fiction and imagination; revolve it in our minds, and because it is possible it may return, look upon it as not gone. Like anguish patients, we count ourselves sick on our well day, because we expect a fit the next. A strange stupid folly thus to court vexation, and be miserable in chimera. Does any man, or indeed any beast, desire to keep a distasteful relish in his mouth, to chew the cud upon gall and wormwood? Yet certainly there aare multitude of people whose lives are embittered to them merely by these fantastic imaginary sufferings. Nor

do we only fright ourſelves with images and ideas of paſt calamities, but we dreſs up new bugbears and falſe terrors, are poetic and aerial in our inventions, and lay romantic ſcenes of diſtreſſes. This is a thing very incident to jealous natures, who are always raiſing alarms to themſelves. A ſuſpicious man looks on every body with dread. One man he fears has deſigns upon his fortune, another on his reputation; perhaps a third upon his life; whilſt in the mean time, the only ill deſign againſt him is managed by himſelf; his own cauſeleſs fears and jealouſies, which put him in a ſtate of hoſtility with all the world, and do often betray him to the very things he groundleſly ſuſpected. For it is not ſeldom ſeen than men have incurred real miſchiefs by a fond ſolicitude of avoiding imaginary ones. I do not queſtion but this is a ſtate calamitous enough, and ſhall acknowledge it very likely that ſuch perſons ſhall have little or no truce from their troubles, who have ſuch an unexhauſted ſpring within themſelves; yet we may ſay to them as the Prophet did to the houſe of *Jacob*, *Is the ſpirit of the Lord ſtraightened? are theſe his doings?* Micah ii. 7. Such men muſt

not cry out that God's hand lies heavy upon them, but their own; and so can be no impeachment to the truth of our observation, that God's blessings are of a longer duration, keep a more fixed steady course than his punishments. The result of all is, that the generality of mankind have good (things even as to temporals) which do in the three respects forementioned exceed the ill. I mean the true and real ills which God sends, though not those fanciful ones they raise to themselves.

20. And now why should it not appear a reasonable proposition that men should entertain themselves with the pleasanter parts of God's dispensations to them, and not always pore upon the harsher; especially since the former are so much a fairer object and perpetually in their eye, why should we look on the more sadning and distressing spectacles of human frailty or misfortune, thro' all the magnifying optics our fancies can supply, and perversly turn away our eyes from the chearfuller? Yet this God knows is too much the case with the most of us, How nicely and critically do we observe every little adverse accident of our lives? when alas! a whole current of prosperity glides by without our notice. Like little children our fingers are never off the sore place, till we have picked eve-

ry light ſcratch into an ulcer. Nay, like the lewder ſort of beggars, we make artificial ſores to give us a pretence of complaint. And can we then expect God ſhould concern himſelf in the cure? Indeed in the courſe of his ordinary providence there is no cure for ſuch people, unleſs it be by revulſion, the making them feel the ſmart of ſome very great and preſſing affliction. They therefore put themſelves under an unhappy dilemma, either to continue their own tormentors, or to endure the ſevereſt courſe of God's diſcipline. 'Tis true the laſt is the moſt eligible, but I am ſure the beſt way is to prevent both by a juſt and grateful ſenſe of God's mercies, which will be yet further illuſtrated, if we compare them with our own demerits.

When with our ſufferings we compare
The enjoyments we poſſeſs,
Great God! how great thy mercies are,
Thy juſtice we confeſs.

Sect. V.

Of our Demerit towards God.

1. It is the common fault of our nature, that we are very apt to be partial to ourſelves, and to ſquare our expectations more by that wiſh, than by what we deſerve. Something of this is viſible in our dealings with men. We oft look to *reap where we have not ſowed*, Matth. xxv. 24. expect benefits where we do none: Yet in civil tranſactions there are ſtill remaining ſuch footſteps of natural juſtice, that we are not univerſally ſo unreaſonable; all traffic and commerce ſubſiſting upon the principle of equal retribution, giving one good thing for another equivalent; ſo that no man expects to buy corn with chaff, or gold with droſs. But in our dealings with God, we put off even this common equity; are vaſt in our expectations, but penurious and baſe in our returns; and as if God were our ſteward not our Lord, we require of him with a confidence proper only to thoſe who aſk their own; whilſt in the interim, what we offer to him is with ſuch a diſdainful ſlightneſs, as if we meant it rather an alms than an homage.

2. God indeed is so munificent, that he *prevents us with his blessings*, Psal. xxi. 3. gives us many things before we ask; had he not done so we could not have been so much as in a capacity of asking. But though the first and fundamental mercies are absolute and free, yet the subsequent are conditional: And accordingly we find in scripture, that God makes no promise either concerning this life or a better, but on condition of obedience. The Jews who had much larger proposals of temporal happiness than Christians have, yet never had them upon other terms. God expressly articled for the performance of his commands, and made all their enjoyments forfeitable upon the failure, as we may see at large in the book of Deuteronomy. And under the Gospel, St. *Paul* appropriates the *promises as well of this life as of that to come unto godliness*, 1 Tim. iv. 8. It will therefore be a material inquiry for every man, whether he have kept his title entire, and have not by breach of the condition forfeited his claim even to the most common ordinary blessings; for if he have, common reason will tell him he can challenge none; and that the utmost he can hope for, must be only upon a new score of unmerited favour.

3. And here certainly *every mouth must be ſtopped, and all the world become guilty before God*, Rom. iii. 19. For alas! who is there can ſay his obedience has been in any degree proportionable to his obligation? It is manifeſt we have all received abundantly from God's hand, but what has he had from ours? I may challenge the beſt man, to caſt up the account of his beſt day, and tell me whether his receivings have not infinitely exceeded his diſburſements; whether for any one good thing he has done, he has not received many. Nor is the diſparity only in number, but much more in value. God's works are perfect, all he does for us, like the firſt ſix days productions, *all are very good*, Gen. i. but alas! our very *righteouſneſs is as filthy rags*, Iſa. lxiv. 6. We offer *him the blind and the lame*, Mal. i. 8. a few yawning drowſy prayers perhaps, wherein he has the leaſt ſhare; the fuller current of our thoughts running towards our ſecular or ſinful concerns. We drop it may be a ſcanty alms, wherein it is odds our vain-glory ſcrambles for a ſhare with him, if it do not wholly ingroſs it. We ſit an hour at a ſermon, but it is rather to hear the wit or eloquence of the preacher, than the word of God. Like the duller ſort of animals, we like well to have our itching ears ſcratched, but grow ſturdy

and reſtive when we ſhould do what we are there taught. In a word, all our ſervices at the beſt are miſerable, maimed and imperfect; and too often corrupt and unſound. So that God may well upbraid us as he did *Iſrael*, *Offer it now to thy governor, will he be pleaſed with it?* Mal. i. 8. Theſe very iniquities of our holy things, are enough to defeat all our pretence to any good from God's hand. Yet God knows this is much the beſt ſide of us: It is not every one that can make ſo fair an appearance as this amounts to. With many, there is no place to complain of the blemiſhes of their ſacrifices, for they offer none; of whom we may ſay in the words of the Pſalmiſt, *God is not in all their thoughts*, Pſal. x. 4. I fear there want not thoſe who drive away the day, the week, nay the year, without remembring in whoſe *hand their time is*, Pſal. xxxi. 16. or paying him any ſolemn tribute of it; who enjoy the ſervices of all inferior creatures, without conſidering that theirs are more due to the ſupreme Lord: In a word, who live as if they were abſolutely independent; had their exiſtence purely from themſelves, and had no Creator to whom they owed their being, or any conſequent duty. And ſure men who thus diſcard themſelves from God's family, have very little reaſon to

expect the provisions of it: Yet even such as these have the impudence to complain, if any thing be wanting to their needs (shall I say) or to their lusts; can ravingly profane God's name in their impatiencies, which they know not how to use in their prayers; as if the Deity were considerable in no other notion, than that of their caterer or steward.

4. If now we seriously reflect, what can be more admirable than that infinite patience of God, who notwithstanding the miserable infirmities of the pious, and the lewd contempt of the impious, still goes on resolutely in his bounty, and continues to all mankind some, and to some all his temporal blessings? He has no obligation of justice to do so, for it is no part of his compact; he has none of gratitude, for he is perpetually affronted and disobliged. Surely we may well say with *David*, *Is this after the manner of men, O Lord*, 1 Chron. xvii. 17. Can the highest human indulgence bear any proportion with this divine clemency? No certainly, no finite patience but would be exhausted with the thousandth part of our provocations.

5. But is not our dealing too as little after the manner of men; I mean of rea-

ſonable creatures? For us who have forfeited our right to all, and yet by mere favour are ſtill kept in the poſſeſſion of many great bleſſings; for us to grow mutinous, becauſe there is perhaps ſomething more trifling which is denied us, is ſuch a ſtupid ingratitude, as one would think impoſſible to human nature. Should a tenant with us have at once forfeited his leaſe, and maliciouſly affronted his landlord, he would ſure think himſelf very gently dealt with, if he were ſuffered to enjoy but a part of his firſt eſtate; but we ſhould think him not only inſolent, but mad, who when the whole were left him, ſhould quarrel and clamour if he might not have his cottage adorned with marble floors, and gilded roofs. Yet at this wild rate we behave ourſelves to our great Landlord, grow pettiſh and angry if we have not every thing we can fancy, though we enjoy many more uſeful, merely by his indulgence. And can there be any thing imagined more unreaſonable? Let us therefore, if not for piety, yet at leaſt to juſtify our claim to rationality, be more ingenuous; let us not conſult only with our fond appetites, and be thus perpetually ſoliciting this ſatisfaction; but rather reflect on what tenure we hold what we already have, even that of ſuperabundant mercy; and fear, leaſt like inſolent beg-

gars, by the impudence of our demands, we divert even that charity which was designed us. In short, let every man, when he computes what he wants of his desires, reckon as exactly how much he is short of his duty; and when he has duly pondered both, he will think it a very gentle composition to have the one unsupplied, so he may have the other remitted; and will see cause contentedly to sit down and say with honest *Mephibosheth*, *What right have I to cry any more unto the king?* 2 Sam. xix. 28. But if it be thus with us upon the mere score of our imperfections or omissions, what an obnoxious state do our innumerable actual sins put us in? If the spots of our sacrifices are provoking, what are our sacrileges and bold profanations? If those who neglect or forget God are listed among his enemies, what are those who avowedly defy him? Indeed he who soberly considers the world, and sees how daringly the divine Majesty is daily affronted, cannot but wonder that the perversions of our manners, those prodigies in morality, should not be answered with as great prodigies in calamity too; that we should either have other ruin than that of *Sodom*, or the earth serve us for any other purpose than to be, as it was to *Korah*, Numb. xvi. 32. our living sepulchre.

6. Nor is this forbearance of God obſervable only towards the maſs and collective body of mankind, but to every man in particular. Who is there that if he ranſack his conſcience, ſhall not find guilts enough to juſtify God in the utmoſt ſeverities towards him? So that how much ſoever his puniſhments are ſhort of that, ſo much he evidently owes to the lenity and compaſſion of God. And who is there that ſuffers in this world the utmoſt that God can inflict? We have a great many ſuffering capacities, and if thoſe were all filled up to the height, our condition would ſcarce differ from that of the damned in any thing but duration. But God is more merciful, and never inflicts at that rate on us here. Every man's experience can tell him, that God diſcharges not his whole quiver at once upon him, but exempts him in many more particulars than he afflicts him; and yet the ſame experience will probably tell moſt of us, that we are not ſo modeſt in our aſſaults upon God; we attack him in all his concerns (as far as our feeble malice can reach) in his ſovereignty, in his honour, in his relatives, nay ſometimes in his very eſſence and being. And as they are univerſal in reſpect of him, ſo alſo in regard of ourſelves: we engage all our powers in this war, do not only *yield* (as the Apoſtle

ſpeaks) *our members inſtruments of unrighteouſneſs*, Rom. vi. 19. but we preſs them upon the ſervice of ſenſual and vile luſts, even beyond our native propenſions. Nor are only the members of our body, but the faculties of our ſouls thus employed; our underſtandings are buſied firſt in contriving ſins, and then excuſes and diſguiſes for them; our wills are yet more ſturdy rebels, and when the underſtanding is beat out of all its out-works, yet ſullenly keep their hold In ſpite of all conviction; and our affections madly ruſh on *like the horſe into the battle*, Jer. viii. 6. deterred by nothing of danger, ſo there be but ſin enough in the attempt.

7. And now with what face can people that thus purſue an hoſtility, expect that it ſhould not be returned to them? Does any man denounce war, and yet expect from his adverſary all the careſſes, the obligements of friendſhip? Self-defence will prompt even the meekeſt nature to deſpoil his enemy at leaſt of thoſe things which he uſes to his annoyance; and if God ſhould give way even to that loweſt degree of anger, where or what were we? For ſince we employ our whole ſelves againſt him, nothing but deſtruction can avert our injuries. But 'tis happy for us we have to do with one who cannot fear

us, who knows the impotence of our wild attempts, and ſo allays his reſentment of our inſolence, with his pity of our follies. Were it not for this, we ſhould not be left in a poſſibility ſo oft to iterate our provocations; every wicked imagination and black deſign, would be at once defeated and puniſhed by infatuation and frenzy: every blaſphemous atheiſtical ſpeech would wither the tongue, like that *arm* of *Jeroboam* which he ſtretched againſt the prophet, 1 Kings xiii. 4. and every impious act would, like the prohibited retroſpect of *Lot*'s wife, fix us perpetual monuments of divine vengeance.

8. And then how much do we owe to the mercy and commiſeration of our God, that *he ſuffers not his whole diſpleaſure to ariſe*, Pſal. lxxviii. 38. that he abates any thing of that juſt ſeverity he might uſe toward us? He that is condemned to the gallows, would think it a mercy to eſcape with any inferior penalty. Why have we then ſuch mean thoughts of God's clemency, when he deſcends to ſuch low compoſitions with us? corrects us ſo lightly as if 'twere only matter of ceremony and punctilio, the regard of his honour, rather than the execution of his wrath. For alas let him among us that is the moſt

innocent, and undeſervedly afflicted, muſter up his ſins and ſufferings, and he will ſee a vaſt inequality: and (had he not other grounds of aſſurance) would be almoſt tempted to think thoſe were not the provoking cauſes, they are ſo unproportionably anſwered. He ſins in innumerable inſtances, and is puniſhed in few; he ſins habitually and perpetually, and ſuffers rarely and ſeldom; nay perhaps he has ſometimes ſinned with greedineſs, and yet God has puniſhed with regret and reluctancy. *How ſhall I give thee up, O Ephraim?* Hoſ. xi. 8. And when all the diſparities are conſidered, we muſt certainly join heartily in *Ezra*'s confeſſion, *Thou, O God, has puniſhed us leſs than our iniquities deſerve*, Ezra ix. 13.

9. Nay beſides all our antecedent, we have after guilts no leſs provoking, I mean our ungracious repinings at the light chaſtiſements of our former ſins, our outcries upon every little uneaſineſs, which may juſtly cauſe God to turn our whips into ſcorpions; and according as he threatened *Iſrael*, Lev. xxvi. 18. *to puniſh us yet ſeven times more.* And yet even this does not immediately exaſperate him. The Jews were an inſtance how long he could bear with a murmuring generation; but certainly we of this nation are a greater;

Yet let us not be high minded but fear, Rom. xi. 20. for we ſee at laſt the doom fell heavy though it was protracted; a ſucceſſion of miraculous judgments purſued thoſe murmurers, ſo that not one of them entered Canaan. And it is very obſervable, that whereas to others ſins God's denunciations are in ſcripture conditional and reverſible; this was abſolute and bound with an oath, *He ſware in his wrath that they ſhould not enter into his reſt*, Pſal. xcv. 11. And yet if we compare the hardſhips of the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs with moſt of our ſufferings, we ſhall be forced to confeſs our mutinies have leſs temptation, and conſequently leſs excuſe; from whence 'tis very reaſonable to infer, as the greatneſs of our danger if we perſiſt, ſo the greatneſs of God's long-ſuffering towards us, who yet allows us ſpace to reform; and ſure new complaints found very ill from us, who are liable to ſo ſevere an account for our old ones. I fear the moſt reſigned perſons of us will upon recollection find, they have upon one occaſion or other outvied the number of the Iſraelites' murmurs, therefore unleſs we will emulate them in their plagues, let us fear to add one more, leſt that make up the fatal ſum, and render our deſtruction irrevocable.

10. Upon all these considerations it appears how little reason any of us have to repine at our heaviest pressures. But there is yet a farther circumstance to be adverted to, and is too applicable to many of us, that is, that our sins are not only the constant meritorious cause of our sufferings, but they are also very often the instrumental cause also; and produce them not only by way of retaliation from God, but by a natural efficacy. *Solomon* tells us, he that *loves pleasure, shall be a poor man*, and that *a whorish woman shall bring a man to a piece of bread*, Prov. vi. 26. *that he that sits long at the wine, shall have redness of eyes*, Chap. xxiii. 29. 30. *that the slothful soul shall suffer hunger*, Chap. xix. 15. and all these not by immediate supernatural infliction from God, but as the proper genuine effects of those respective vices. Indeed God in his original establishment of things, has made so close a connexion between sin and punishment, that he is not often put to exert his power in any extraordinary way, but may trust us to be our own beadles, our own *backslidings reprove us*, Jer. ii. 19. *and our iniquities are* of themselves enough to *become our ruin*.

11. It may therefore be a seasonable question for every man to put to himself,

whether the troubles he labours under be not of this ſort; whether the poverty he complains of, be not the effect of his riot and profuſion, his ſloth and negligence? whether when he cries out that *his comelineſs is turned into corruption*, Dan. x. 8. he may not anſwer himſelf, that they are his viſits to the harlot's houſe, which have thus made *rottenneſs enter into his bones*, Hab. iii. 16. whether when he is beſet with contentions, and has wounds without cauſe, *he has not tarried long at the wine*; when he has loſt a friend, whether he has not by ſome *treacherous wound*, Eccl. xxii. 22. forced him to depart: or when he lives under infamy, whether it be not only the echo of his own ſcandalous crimes. If he find it thus with him, certainly his mouth is ſtopt, and he cannot without the moſt diſingenuine impudence complain of any but himſelf. He could not be ignorant that ſuch effects did naturally attend ſuch cauſes, and therefore if he would take the one, he muſt take the other alſo. No man ſure can be ſo mad, as to think God ſhould work miracles (diſunite thoſe things which nature hath conjoined) only that he may ſin at eaſe, and have none of the conſequent ſmart. We read indeed God divided the ſea, but it was to make *the way for the ranſomed of the Lord to paſs over*, Iſa. li. 10,

thoſe who were his own people, and went in at his command; but when they were ſecured, we find the waters immediately returned to their channel, and overwhelmed the Egyptians, who ventured without the ſame warrant. And ſure the caſe is alike here, when any man can produce God's mandate to run into all exceſs of riot, to defecrate the temple of the Holy Ghoſt, *and make his body member of an harlot*, 1 Cor. vi. 15. In a word, when God bids him do any of thoſe things, which God and good men abhor, then and not before he may hope he may ſever ſuch acts from their native penal effects: for till then (how profuſe ſoever ſome legendary ſtories repreſent him) he will certainly never ſo beſtow his miracles.

12. But I fear upon ſcrutiny there will appear a yet farther circumſtance upon which to arraign our mutinies; for though it be unreaſonable enough to charge God with the ill effect of our own leudneſs, yet it is a higher ſtep to murmur becauſe we have not materials to be wicked enough. And this I fear is the caſe with too many of us, who though they are not ſo deſpoiled by their ſins, but that they can keep up their round of vicious pleaſures, yet are diſcontented becauſe they think ſome others have them more

exquiſite, think their vices are not gentle enough, unleſs they be very expenſive, and are covetous only that they may be more luxurious. Theſe are ſuch as St. *James* ſpeaks of, *who aſk amiſs, that they may conſume it upon their luſts*, Jam. iv. 3. and ſure to be mutinous on this account is one of the higheſt pieces of frenzy. Would any man in his wits tell another he will cut his throat, and then expect he ſhould furniſh him with a knife for it? And yet to this amount our murmurs againſt God, for his not giving us thoſe things wherewith we only deſign to wage war with him. For ſurely if the diſcontents of mankind were cloſely inſpected, I doubt a great many would be found of this kind. It concerns the reader therefore, to make the inquiſition in his own breaſt, both in this and all the former particulars, and I doubt not, if he do it with any ingenuity and uprightneſs, he will be abundantly convinced that for his few mites of obedience he pays to God, he receives talents of mercies (even temporal) from him: And that on the other ſide, that God as much underpays his ſins, as he overpays his ſervices: By which God does ſufficiently atteſt how little he delights in our affliction; how gladly he takes any light occaſion of careſſing and cheriſhing, and overſkips thoſe of puniſh-

ing us. Which ſure ought to make us convert all our diſpleaſures againſt our ſins, which extort thoſe acts of ſeverity from him, to which his nature is moſt averſe. And here indeed our reſentments cannot be too ſharp, but towards God our fitteſt addreſs will be in the penitential form of the Prophet *Daniel*, *O Lord, to us belongeth confuſion of face, but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveneſs, though we have rebelled againſt him*, Dan. ix. 8, 9. And as his juſtice is to be revered in his inflictions, ſo is his wiſdom alſo, in ſo diſpoſing of events to particular perſons as may beſt conſiſt with the univerſal economy and management of the world, the conſideration whereof is the deſign of the next ſection.

When our demerits we compare
With God's forgiving grace,
No ſufferings we e'er can bear
For complaint to have place.

When our great failings we compare
With God's forbearing love,
Our ſufferings then will light appear,
As they come from above.

Sect. VI.

Of God's general Providence.

WHEN God made the univerſe, he intended not only to glorify himſelf in one tranſient act of his power, and then leave this great and wonderful production of his, as the *oſtrich her eggs in the wilderneſs*, Lam. iv. 3. but having drawn it out of its firſt chaos, he ſecured it from returning thither again, by eſtabliſhing as a due ſymmetry of parts, ſo alſo a regular order of motion: Hence it is that the heavens have their conſtant revolutions, the earth its ſucceſſion of determinate ſeaſons, animals their alternate courſe of generation and corruption; and by this wiſe economy, the world after ſo many thouſand years, ſeems ſtill in its ſpring and firſt beauty. But it had been in vain to have thus ſecured the defection of the creatures, if man for whoſe ſake they were made had been excluded from this care. His faculty of reaſon would have made him but the more fatal inſtrument of confuſion, and taught him the more compendious ways of diſturbing the world. *Job* compares him *to the wild aſſes colt*, Job xi. 12. which takes its range without adverting to any thing of the common good.

God has therefore doubly hedged in this unruly creature, made a fence of laws about him (both natural and poſitive) and beſides has taken him into the common circle of his providence, ſo that he, as well as the reſt of the creation, has his particular ſtation aſſigned him; and that not only in reference to other creatures, but himſelf; has put a difference between one man and another, ordained ſeveral ranks and claſſes of men, and endowed them with ſpecial and appropriate qualifications for thoſe ſtations wherein he has ſet them.

2. This, as it is a work of infinite wisdom in God, ſo it is of unſpeakable advantage to men. Without this regular diſpoſure, the world would have been in the ſame confuſion which we read of in the hoſt of the *Midianites*, *every man's ſword againſt his fellow.* Judg. vii. 22. Nothing but force could determine who ſhould do, or enjoy any thing; and even that deciſion alſo would have been repealable by a greater force: So that we have all reaſon to confeſs the utility of that order God has ſet among men; and even he that bears the loweſt and moſt deſpicable place in it, is certainly infinitely more happy by contributing to that general har-

mony, than he could be in any ſtate of diſcord.

3. Were this now well conſidered, methinks it ſhould ſilence all our complaints, and men ſhould not be ſo vehemently concerned in what part of the ſtructure it pleaſes the great Architect to put them; for every man is to look on himſelf only as a ſmall parcel of thoſe materials which God is to put into form. Every ſtone is not fit for the corner, not every little rafter for the main beam: The wiſdom of the Maſter-builder is alone to determine that. And ſure there cannot be a more vile contempt of the divine wiſdom than to diſpute his choice. Had God wiſdom enough to contrive this vaſt and beautiful fabric, and may he not be truſted with one of us poor worms? Did he by his *wiſdom make the heavens, and by his underſtanding ſtretch out the clouds*, Prov. iii. 19. and ſhall he not know where to place a little lump of figured earth? This is certainly the moſt abſurd diſtruſt imaginable, and yet this is really the true meaning of our repining at the condition he has placed us in.

4. The truth is, we are ſo full of ourſelves, that we can ſee nothing beyond it; Every man expects God ſhould place him

where he has a mind to be, though by it he diſcompoſe the whole ſcheme of his providence. But though we are are ſo ſenſeleſsly partial, yet God is not ſo: He that comprehends at once that whole concern of mankind, applies himſelf to the accommodating thoſe, not the humouring any particular perſon. *He that hath made the great and the ſmall, and careth for all alike*, Wiſd. vi. 7. He is the common Father of mankind, and diſpoſes things for the public advantage of this great family, and it is not all the impatient cravings of a froward child that ſhall make him recede from his deſigned method. We are apt enough, I am ſure, to tax it not only as a weakneſs, but injuſtice too in a prince, when he indulges any thing to a private favourite to the public diſadvantage; yet ſo unequal are we, that we murmur at God for not doing that which we murmur at men for doing.

5. Beſides a man is to conſider, that other men have the ſame appetites with himſelf. If he diſlike an inferior ſtate, why ſhould he not think others do ſo too? and then as the wiſe man ſpeaks, *Whoſe voice ſhall the Lord hear?* Eccluſ. xxxiv. 24. It is ſure great inſolence in me to expect that God ſhould be more concerned to humour me, than thoſe multitudes of

others who have the ſame deſires. And the more impatient my longings are, the leſs in reaſon ſhould be my hopes; for mutiny is no ſuch endearing quality as to render any man a darling to God. But if all men ſhould have equal ſatisfactions, we ſhould puzzle even Omnipotence itſelf. Every man would be above and ſuperior, yet thoſe are comparative terms; and if no man were below, no man could be above. So in wealth, moſt men deſire more, but every man does at leaſt deſire to keep what he has; how then ſhall one part of the world be ſupplied without the diminution of the other, unleſs there ſhould be as miraculous a multiplication of treaſure for a man's avarice, as there was of loaves for their hunger, Matth. xvi. 9. It was a good anſwer which the ambaſſadors of an oppreſt province made to *Anthony*, "If, O emperor, thou wilt "have double taxes from us, thou muſt "help us to double ſprings and harveſts." And ſure God muſt be at the expence of a new creation, make us a double world, if he ſhould oblige himſelf to ſatisfy all the unreaſonable appetites of men: And if he ſatisfy not all, why ſhould any particular perſon look that his alone ſhould be indulged to him?

6. Yet as unreaſonable as it is, the moſt of us do betray ſuch a perſuaſion. No man is diſcontented that there are lower, as well as higher degrees in the world, that there are poor as well as rich, but all ſenſible men aſſent to the fitneſs of it; yet if themſelves happen to be ſet in the lower form, they exclaim as if the whole order of the world were ſubverted; which is a palpable indication that they think that Providence which governs others ſhould ſerve them, and diſtribute to them not what it, but themſelves think good. This immoderate ſelf-love is the ſpring and root of moſt of our complaints, makes us ſuch unequal judges in our own concerns, and prompts us to put in caveats and exceptions on our own behalf, as *David* did on his ſon's, *See that thou hurt not the young man Abſalom*, 2 Sam. xviii. 5. as if God were to manage the government of the world with a particular regard to our liking, and were like the angels at *Sodom*, Gen. xix. 22. to *do nothing till we had got into Zoar*, had all our demands ſecured to us.

7. It would indeed aſtoniſh a conſidering man to ſee, that although the concerns of men are all diſpoſed by an unerring Wiſdom, and acknowledged by themſelves to be ſo, yet that ſcarce any man

is pleaſed. The truth is, we have generally in us the worſer part of the Leveler's principle, and tho' we can very contentedly behold multitudes below us, yet are impatient to ſee any above us; not only the *foot* (to uſe the Apoſtle's ſimile) *complains that it is not the hand, but the ear becauſe it is not the eye*, 1 Cor. xii. 15, 16. Not only the lowermoſt, but the higher ranks of men are uneaſy, if there be any one ſtep above them. Nay ſo importunate is this aſpiring humour, that we ſee men are forced to feed it, though but with air and ſhadows. He that cannot make any real advance in his quality, will yet do it in effigies, in all little gayeties and pageantries of it. Every degree in theſe reſpects not only emulates, but imitates its ſuperior, till at laſt by that impatience of their proper diſtance they make it greater, and ſink even below their firſt ſtate by their ridiculous profuſion. Indeed the world ſeems to be ſo over-run with this vanity, that there is little viſible diſtinction of the degrees, and one had need go to the herald's office to know men's qualities, for neither their habit nor equipage do now-a-days inform us with any certainty.

8. But by all this it appears, that men look on themſelves only as ſingle perſons,

without reference to the community whereof they are members. For did they conſider that, they would endeavour rather to become the places wherein they were ſet, by doing the duties belonging to them, than be perpetually projecting for a change. A tree that is every year tranſplanted, will never bear fruit, and a mind that is always hurried from its proper ſtation, will ſcarce ever do good in any. This is excellently expreſſed to us by *Solomon*, *As a bird that wandereth from his neſt, ſo is a man that wandereth from his place*, Prov. xxvii. 8. 'Tis eaſy to divine the fate of thoſe young ones from whom the dam wanders, and it is eaſy to gueſs how the duties of that place will be performed, whoſe owner is always upon the wing, and making towards another. I wiſh we had not too coſtly experiments both in church and ſtate, of the truth of this obſervation. Alas! we forget that we are all ſervants to the ſame Maſter, and that he is to appoint in what office we ſhall ſerve him. How ſhould we like it in any of our own families, to have an inferior officer leave his work undone, becauſe he has more mind to be a ſuperior officer? Yet this inſolence we every day repeat towards God, ſullenly diſpute his order, and unleſs we may chuſe our own employments, will do nothing.

9. It is evident, this perverſe temper of mankind breeds a great deal of miſchief and diſturbance in the world, but would breed arrant confuſion and ſubverſion, if it were ſuffered to have its full range. If God permit but one ambitious ſpirit to break looſe in an age, as the inſtrument of his wrath, what deſtruction does it often times make? How does it *cauſe the whole earth to tremble, and ſhake kingdoms*, as is ſaid of *Nebuchadnezzar*, Iſa. xiv. 16. and may be ſaid of many others of thoſe wholeſale robbers who have dignified the trade? But if every aſpiring humour ſhould be as proſperous, where would it find fuel to maintain the flame? No doubt every age produces men of as unbounded deſires as *Alexander* or *Ceſar*, but God gives them not the ſame opportunity to trouble the world. And accordingly in the more petty ambitions of private men he often orders it ſo, that thoſe ſoaring minds can find no benign gale to help ther mounting. He that ſets bounds to the ſea, ſaying *Hitherto ſhalt thou come and no farther; and tho' the waves thereof toſs themſelves, yet can they not prevail, tho' they roar, yet can they not paſs over*. Jer. v. 22. does alſo depreſs the ſwelling pride of men, hangs clogs and weights upon them, that they cannot riſe to their affected height. For tho' we are all willing to

forget it, yet God remembers that he is the Ruler of the univerſe, and will aſſert his dominion. The ſubtileſt contrivance cannot circumvent him, the moſt daring pretender cannot wreſt any thing out of his hand; the *Lord will ſtill be king, be the people never ſo impatient*, Pſal. xcix. 1. It will therefore ſure be as well our prudence as our duty, to *be ſtill, and know that he is God*, Pſal. xlvi. 10. with an humble forſaking of our own wills, acquieſce in his, and not by ineffective ſtrugglings provoke, whom we are ſure never to ſubdue. We may, like unmanaged horſes, foam and fret, but ſtill God has the bridle in our jaws, and we cannot advance a ſtep further than he permits us. Why ſhould we then create torment to ourſelves by our repinings, which only ſets us further from our aims. It is God's declared method to exalt the lowly, and it is obſervable in the two firſt kings of Iſrael, who were of God's immediate election, that he ſurpriſed them with that dignity, when they were about mean and humble employments, the one ſearching his father's aſſes, the other keeping his father's ſheep: And would men honeſtly and diligently exerciſe themſelves in the buſineſs of their proper calling, they might perhaps find it a more direct road to advancement, than all the ſiniſter arts by which ambitious men endea-

vor to climb. *Solomon* ſets it down as an example, *Seeſt thou a man diligent in his buſineſs, he ſhall ſtand before kings, he ſhall not ſtand before mean men*, Prov. xxii. 29. But whether it happen to have that effect or no, it will have a better, for it will ſweeten his preſent condition, divert his mind from mutinous reflections on other men's height, and his own lowlineſs; for it is commonly men who mind not their work that are at ſo much leiſure to gaze. He that carefully plies his own buſineſs, will have his thoughts more concentrated; and doubtleſs it is no ſmall happineſs to have them ſo, for it is their gadding too much abroad, looking on other men's conditions that ſends them back (like *Dinah* deflowered) to put all in an uproar at home. The ſon of *Syrach* ſpeaks with tranſportation of the ſtate even of him that labours and is content, and calls it *a ſweet life*, Eccluſ. xl. 18. And certainly it is infinitely more ſo than that of the greateſt Prince, whoſe mind ſwells beyond his territories.

10. Upon all theſe conſiderations, it cannot but appear very reaſonable, that we ſhould leave God to govern the world; not be putting in like the ſons of *Zebedee*, for the higheſt ſeats, but continually reſt ourſelves where he has placed us, till his Providence (not our own deſigns) advance

us. We can no where be so obscure as to be hid from his eyes, who as he valued the widow's mite above the great oblations of the rich, so he will no less graciously accept the humble endeavors of the mean, than the more eminent services of the mighty; himself having declared, That he accepts, *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*, 2 Cor. viii. 12. So that in what rank soever a man is set, he has still the opportunity of approving himself to God; and tho' in the eye of the world he be a vessel of dishonor, yet in the day that God comes to *make up his jewels*, Mal. iii. 17. there will be another estimate made of him who regularly moves in his own sphere. And sure he that sits down in this acquiescence is a happier man, than he that enjoys the greatest worldly splendor; but infinitely more so than he who impatiently covets but cannot attain them: For such a man puts himself upon a perpetual rack, keeps his appetites at the utmost stretch, and yet has nothing wherewith to satisfy them. Let therefore our ease, if not our duty prompt us to acquiescence, and a ready submission to God's disposals; to which we have yet a further inducement from that distinct care he hath over every man's peculiar, by which he proportions to him what is really best for him; of which we

are further to conſider in the next Section.

The Lord is God, and he alone
With univerſal ſway commands;
His Power let every Creature own,
Submitting all Things to his Hands.

SECT. VII.

Of God's particular Providence.

IT is the imperfection of our finite nature that we cannot at once attend to divers things, but the more vehement our intention is upon one, the greater is our neglect of the reſt. But God's infinity cannot be ſo bounded; his eyes at once ſee, and his providence at once orders all the moſt diſtant and deſperate things in the world. He is not ſuch an epicurean deity, as to ſequeſter himſelf wholly to the enjoyment of his own felicity, and to deſpiſe the concerns of poor mortals; but though he have his *dwelling ſo high, yet he*

humbleth himself to behold the things in heaven and earth Pſal. cxiii. 5, 6. Nor does his providence confine itſelf to the more ſplendid and greater parts of management, the conduct of empires and ſtates, but it deſcends to the loweſt parts of his creation, to the fowls of the air, to the lilies of the field; and then ſure our Saviour's inference as to mankind is inconteſtable, *Are ye not much better than they?* Matth. 26. If a ſparrow (as he elſewhere tells his diſciples) cannot fall to the ground without God's particular notice, ſurely no human creature is leſs conſiderable to him; nay, if our very hairs are numbered, we cannot think ths excreſcence is of more value than the ſtoke, but muſt conclude that God with a particular advertence, watches over the concerns of every man.

2. Now God being infinitely good, cannot thus attend us upon any inſidious deſign of doing us miſchief: He watches over us as a guardian, not as a ſpy; and directs his obſervation to the more ſeaſonable adapting his benefits. And as he is thus gracious in deſigning our advantage, ſo he is no leſs wiſe in contriving it. *All things*, ſays the wiſe man, *are not profitable for all men*, Eccluſ. xxxvii. 28. Indeed nothing is abſolutely good but God: all created things are good or ill reference to

that to which they are applied. Meat is good, but to a ſurfeited ſtomach it is not only nauſeous, but dangerous. Fire is good, but if put in our boſoms, not only burns our clothes but fleſh. And as human wiſdom directs the right application of theſe and the like, ſo the ſupreme and divine, orders events according to the diſpoſition of the perſon concerned; *he knows our frame*, Pſal. ciii. 14. and diſcerns what operation ſuch or ſuch things will have upon us, while we who know neither ourſelves nor them, can make but random gueſſes, and worſe choices. And ſure he that does but thus in the general, acknowledge God's providence, goodeſs and wiſdom (which he is no chriſtian that does not) has a ſufficient cure againſt all his ſolicitudes, much more his repinings. He cannot think he ſuffers unawares to him who ſees all things. He cannot think his ſufferings are deſigned for ill to him, becauſe they are diſpoſed by him who intends and projects his good. Nor can he fear thoſe intentions can miſcarry, which are guided by an infinite and unerring wiſdom, and backed by an uncontrolable power. And ſure this is as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. vi. 18. *ſtrong conſolation*, if we would duly apply it.

3. Yet becauſe general notions do often make but light impreſſions on us, it may not be amiſs to make a little more inſpection, and to obſerve how applicable they are to to the ſeveral kinds of our diſcontents. Now thoſe may be reduced to two; for either we are troubled at the want of ſomething we deſire, or at the ſuffering of ſomething we would avert; ſo that the two notions of privative and poſitive, divide between them all our affliction.

4. The firſt of theſe is uſually the moſt comprehenſive, for there are few who have not more torment from the apprehenſion of ſomewhat they want, than from the ſmart of any thing they feel. And indeed while our deſires are ſo vagrant and exorbitant, they will be ſure to furniſh matter enough for our diſcontents. But certainly there is not in the world ſuch a charm for them, as the conſideration that God is more wiſe to diſcern, and more careful to provide what is really good for us than we ourſelves. We poor ſhortſighted creatures look only on the ſurface of things, and if we ſee a beautiful appearance, ſomewhat that invites our ſenſes, we court it with the utmoſt earneſtneſs; but God penetrates deeper, he ſees to the bottom both of us and thoſe things

we desire, and find often though they may please our appetite, they will hurt our health ; and will no more give them to us, than a careful father will to his child those gilded poisons he cries for. Perhaps this man is taken with the enchanting music of fame, likes not his own obscure station, but would fain present himself upon a more public Theatre, come into the eye and croud of the world ; but how little does he know how he shall act his part there; whether he shall come off with an applause or a hiss ? He may render himself but the more public spectacle of scorn ; or if he do not that, he may by a better success, feed up his vain glory to such a bulk, as may render him too great weight for that tottering pinnacle whereon he stands : and so after he has made a towering circle, he may fall back with more ignominy to his first point. Another it may be, no less eagerly desires wealth, thinks (as once *Cræsus* did) that he that abounds in treasure cannot be empty of felicity ; but alas how knows he how he shall employ it ? There are two contrary temptations that attend riches, riots, and covetousness ; and he is sure a little too confident, that dares promise himself that when there is such odds against him, he shall certainly chuse the one just mean ;

and if he do not, he does only inflame his account at the great audit. Beſides the more wealth he has, the fairer booty he is to the avarice of others; and it has been often ſeen, that many a man had not died ſo poor, if he had lived leſs rich. Another perhaps thinks not himſelf ſo much to want wealth as children to heir it, and complains with *Abraham*, *Lord*, *what wilt thou give me*, *ſeeing I go childleſs?* Gen. xv. 2. yet how knows he whether that child he ſo much deſires, *ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool*, Eccl. ii. 19. a comfort or a vexation to himſelf if he live to ſee his proof? and if he do not, he does but project for an acceſs to his dying cares in what hands to leave him. *Rachel* ſolicited this ſatisfaction with the greateſt impatience, *give me children*, *or I die*, Gen. xxx. 1. and 'tis obſervable that the grant of her wiſh proved the loſs of her life.

5. Thus in theſe and innumerable other inſtances we drive on blindfold, and very often impetuouſly purſue that which would ruin us: and were God as ſhort-ſighted as we, into what precipices ſhould we minutely hurry ourſelves? or were he ſo unkind as to conſider our importunity more than our intereſt, we ſhould quickly ſink under the weight of our own wiſhes; and as *Juvenal* in his tenth ſatire excellently

obſerves, become pettiſh by the ſucceſſes and grant of our prayers. I ſuppoſe there is no man that ſoberly recollects the events of his life, but can experimentally ſay, he has ſometimes deſired things which would have been to his miſchief had he had them, and that himſelf has after looked on the denial as a mercy: as on the other ſide when he has proſpered in his aims, and had what his ſoul luſted after, it has been but like the quails to the Iſraelites, a conviction and puniſhment, rather than a ſatisfaction. And now ſurely God may complain of us as he did of Iſrael, *How long will it be e'er you believe me?* Num. xiv. 11. After all the atteſtations he has given of his care and Providence over us, after all the experiments we have had of the folly of our own elections, we cannot yet be brought either to diſtruſt ourſelves, or rely upon him. We will ſtill be chuſing, and look on him as no farther concerned, than as the executioner of our deſigns.

6. This is certainly a ſtrange perverſeneſs, and ſuch as no ſenſible man would be guilty of in any other inſtance. In all our ſecular affairs we truſt thoſe whom we have cauſe to think underſtand them better than ourſelves, and rely upon men in their own faculty. We put our eſtates

into the lawyer's hand, our bodies into the phyſician's, and ſubmit to their advice though it be againſt our humour, merely becauſe we account them more competent judges. Yet this ſubmiſſion we cannot be perſuaded to pay to God, but will ſtill be preſcribing to him, and are very angry if his diſpenſations do not exactly anſwer our fancies. And can we offer him a greater affront than thus to limit him? What is it but interpretatively to deny either his wiſdom, or his goodneſs, or both? and ſo derogate from him in two of his eſſential attributes. For there can be no rational account given by any who believe thoſe, why they ſhould not remit their whole concerns to him. So that the ſhort account is, that in our diſtruſt, we either deny him to be God, or ourſelves to be men, by reſiſting the moſt evident dictates of that reaſon which diſtinguiſhes us from brutes. For certainly there is not in human diſcourſe a more irrefragable maxim, than that we ought for our own ſakes to reſign ourſelves to him, who, we are infallibly ſure, can, and will chuſe better for us than we for ourſelves.

7. This was ſo apparent by mere natural light, that *Socrates* adviſed men to pray only for bleſſings in general, and

leave the particular kind of them to God's election, who beſt knows what is good for us. And ſure this is ſuch a piece of divinity, as extremely reproaches us Chriſtians, who cannot match a Heathen in his implicit faith to God. Nay indeed 'tis the vileſt defamation upon God himſelf, that we who pretend to know him more, ſhould truſt him leſs. So that we ſee our repinings do not terminate in their own proper guilt, but do in their conſequences ſwell higher, and our diſcontents propagate themſelves into blaſphemy. For while we impatiently complain of our wants, we do tacitly tax God to want either that wiſdom, power or love, whereby he ſhould ſupply us. And ſure he muſt be very atheiſtical to whom this will not give a competent prejudice againſt this ſin.

8. And this very conſideration will equally prejudge the other branch of our diſcontents, I mean thoſe which repine at the ills we ſuffer. And not only our privative, but our poſitive afflictions may by it have their bitterneſs taken off: for the ſame goodneſs and wiſdom which denies thoſe things we like, becauſe they are hurtful for us, does upon the very ſame reaſon give us thoſe diſtaſteful things

which he ſees profitable. A wiſe phyſician does not only diet, but if occaſion be, purge his patient alſo. And ſurely there is not ſuch a purifier, ſuch a cleanſer of the ſoul as are afflictions, if we do not (like diſorderly patients) fruſtrate their efficacy by the irregular management of ourſelves under them.

The Lord from Heav'n, his higheſt throne,
Looks down to Earth below,
The creatures he doth call his own,
On all his goodneſs flow.

Sect. VIII.

Of the Advantage of Afflictions.

It were the work of a volume to give an exact and minute account of the benefit of afflictions. I ſhall only point at ſome of the more general and obvious. And firſt, it is one of the moſt awakening calls to repentance; and to this end it is that God moſt uſually deſigns it. We ſee the whole ſcene of it, Hoſ. v. 15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and ſeek my face: in their af-*

fliction they will ſeek me early: and in the very next verſe we find this voice of God echoed forth by a penitential note, *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us up.* Thus we find the brethren of *Joſeph*, though there had a long interval paſſed betwixt their barbarous uſage of him, and his feigned rigor to them, yet when they ſaw themſelves diſtreſſed by the one, then they began to recollect the other, ſaying, *We are very guilty concerning our brother*, Gen. xlii. 21. Proſperity is an intoxicating thing, and there are few brains ſtrong enough to bear it; it lays us aſleep, and amuſes us with pleaſant dreams, whilſt in the mean time *Satan* rifles our treaſures, and ſpoils us, by the deceitful charms of ſins, of our innocency and real happineſs. And can there be a more friendly office done for a man in this condition, than to rouſe him, and bring him to apprehend the deſigns that are laid againſt him? and this is the errand on which afflictions are ſent: ſo that we have reaſon to look on them as our friends and confederates, that intend our reſcue, and to take the alarm they give us, and diligently ſeek out thoſe inteſtine enemies of which they warn us. And he that inſtead of this, quarrels at their interpoſing, thinks them his *enemies*,

because they tell him the truth, Gal. iv. 16. does miserably pervert *the counsel of God against himself*, Luke vii. 30. and may at last verify his own jealousies, and by so provoking an ingratitude, convert those into the wounds of an enemy, which were originally meant as the corrections of a father.

2. And as afflictions do in general admonish us of sins, so it pleases God most frequently so to model and frame them, that they bear the very image and impress of those particular guilts they are to chastise, and are the dark shadows that attend our gay delights, or fragrant insolence. The wise man observes, that the turning the Egyptian waters into blood, was a manifest reproof of that cruel commandment for murdering of the Hebrew infants *Wisd.* xii. 5. And surely we might in most, if not all our sufferings, see some such corresponding circumstances, as may lead us to the immediate provoking cause of it. God who does all things in number, weight and measure, does in punishments also observe a symmetry and proportion, and adapts them not only to the heinousness, but even the very specific kind of our crimes. The only fixed immutable rule he has given for his Vicegerents on earth to punish by, is that in the case of murder,

which is we ſee grounded on this rule of proportion, *He that ſheddeth man's blood, by man ſhall his blood be ſhed*, Gen. ix. 6. And though he hath now cut off the inferior retaliations of the *eye for the eye*, *the tooth for the tooth*, Exod. xxi. 24. (probably for the hardneſs of our hearts, becauſe he ſaw our revengeful natures would be too much pleaſed with it) yet he has not precluded himſelf from acting by thoſe meaſures, but we ſee it does very often ſignally make men feel the ſmart of thoſe violences, or injuſtice they have uſed to others. Of this the ſacred ſtory affords ſeveral examples (as *Adonibezek*, Judg. i. 6. and *Ahab*, 1 King. xxi. 19.) and profane many more, and daily experience and obſervation moſt of all. And though this method of retaliation is not always ſo evident and apparent to the world, becauſe men's ſins are not always ſo, yet I believe if men would duly recollect, it would be for the moſt part diſcernable to their own conſcience, and they would apparently ſee, that their calamities did but trace the footſteps of their ſins.

3. Now if we rightly weigh this, we cannot but think it a very advantageous circumſtance. We are naturally blind, when we look inward, and if we have not ſome adventitious light to clear the object,

will be very apt to overlook it. Therefore ſince the end of all our afflictions is our repentance, it is a wiſe and gracious diſpoſal, that they do thus point to us thoſe particular ſins of which we are to repent. The body of ſin will not be deſtroyed in the whole entire bulk, but muſt be diſmembered, pulled to pieces limb by limb. He that attacks it otherwiſe, will be like *Sertorius's*, ſoldier, who ineffectively tugged at the horſe's tail to get it off at once, when he that pulled it hair by hair quickly did it. Therefore as it a great part of our ſpiritual wiſdom to know in what eſpecial parts the *Sampſon* like ſtrength of our corruptions lie, ſo it is a great inſtance of God's care of us, thus by his corrections to diſcipline and inſtruct us in it.

4. In all our afflictions therefore it is our concern, nicely and critically to obſerve them. I mean not to enhance our murmurs and complaints, but to learn by them what is God's peculiar controverſy againſt us. This is indeed *to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it*, Mic. vi. 9. Let him therefore that ſuffers in any of his concerns, examine whether he have not ſome guilt which anſwers to it, *as face anſwers face*, Provi xxvii. 19. He that is impoveriſhed in his eſtate, let him conſider firſt how he acquired it, whether

there were not ſomething of fraud or injuſtice, which like a cancrous humour, mixt in its very elements and conſtitution, and eat out its bowels: Or whether ſome ſacrilegious prize, ſome coal from the altar have not fired his neſt. Or if nothing can be charged upon the thing gained, let him conſider how he has uſed it; whether he has not made it the fuel of his luſts, in riot and exceſſes, or the object of his adoration in an inordinate value of it. In like manner he who is afflicted in his body, groans under the torment of ſome grievous diſeaſe, may very ſeaſonably interrogate himſelf, whether it has not been contracted by his vice, whether *his bones be not* (in a more literal ſenſe than *Job* meant it) *full of the ſins of his youth*, Job xx. 11. and his ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs be not the cauſe, *that his ſoul*, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *abhors all manner of meat, and is even hard at death's door*, Pſal. cvii. 18. or at leaſt whether the not employing his health and ſtrength to thoſe purpoſes for which it was given, is not the reaſon of its being withdrawn. He alſo that is invaded in his reputation, that lies under ſome great infamy, is to conſider whether it be not deſerved; whether ſome part, if not the whole guilt of which he is accuſed, ſtick not to him: Or if he be clear in that particular inſtance, whether

ſome concealed ſin of his would not if it were known, incur as great ſcandal. For in that caſe he has in right forfeited his reputation, and God may make the ſeizure as well by an unjuſt, as a juſt accuſation. Or if his heart accuſe him not here, yet let him farther reflect, whether his vain-glorious purſuits of praiſe and high conceits of himſelf, have not made this an apt and neceſſary humiliation for him. Or laſtly, let him recollect how he has behaved himſelf towards others in this kind: Whether he has had a juſt tenderneſs of his neighbour's fame, or has not rather expoſed and proſtituted it. In theſe and many other inſtances ſuch a particular ſcrutiny would (in all probability) diſcover the affinity and cognation between our guilts and our puniſhments, and by marking out the ſpring and fountain-head, direct us how to ſtop or divert the current. And he that would diligently employ himſelf in this inquiſition, would find little leiſure, and leſs cauſe to condole his afflictions, but would divert all his complaints upon himſelf, *accept of the puniſhment of his iniquity, and thank the Lord for thus giving him warning*, Pſal. xvi. 7.

5. A ſecond benefit which God deſigns us in our afflictions, is the weaning us from the world, to diſentangle us from its fet-

ters and charms, and draw us to himſelf. We read in the ſtory of the deluge that ſo long as the earth was covered with waters, the very raven was contented to take ſhelter in the ark, but when all was fair and dry, even the dove finally forſook it, Gen. viii. 12. And it is much ſo with us: The worſt of men will commonly in diſtreſſes have recourſe to God (the very heathen mariners in a ſtorm could rebuke *Jonah* for not calling upon his God, Jon. i. 6.) when yet the very beſt of us are apt to forget him amidſt the blandiſhments and inſinuations of proſperity. The kind aſpects of the world are very enchanting, apt to inveigle and beſot us; and therefore it is God's care over us, to let us ſometimes ſee her more averting countenance in her frowns and ſtorms; that, as children frighted by ſome ugly appearance, we may run into the arms of our Father. Alas! were all things exactly fitted to our humours here, when ſhould we think of a remove? and had not death ſome harbingers to prepare us for him, what a ſurpriſing gueſt would he be to us? 'Tis ſtoried of *Antigonus*, that ſeeing a ſoldier in his camp of ſo daring a courage, that he always courted the moſt hazardous attempts, and obſerving him alſo of a very infirm ſickly habit, he took a

particular care of him, and by medicines and good attendance recovered him; which no ſooner had he done, but the man grew more cautious, and would no longer expoſe himſelf as formerly, and gave this reaſon for it, that now he was healthy, his life was of ſome value to him, and not to be hazarded at that ſame rate, as when it was only a burden; and ſhould God cure all our complaints, render us perfectly at eaſe, I fear too many of us would be of the ſoldier's mind, think our lives too good to reſign to him, much more to hazard for him, as our Chriſtianity in many caſes obliges us. The ſon of *Syrach* obſerves, how *dreadful death is to a man that is at reſt in his poſſeſſions, that hath abundance of all things, and hath nothing to vex him;* nay he deſcends much lower, and puts in him *who is yet able to receive meat*, Ecclus. xiv. 1. The truth is, we do ſo paſſionately doat upon the world, that like beſotted lovers we can bear a great deal of ill uſage, before we quit our purſuit. Any little ſlight favour

[illegible]es us after multiplied affronts, and

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confidence. But how fatally [illegible]

we be, if God ſhould permit this ſiren

ways to entertain us with her muſic, and

ſhould not by ſome diſcordant grating

notes, interrupt our raptures, and recall us to ſober thoughts?

6. Indeed it is one of the higheſt inſtances of God's love, and of his clemency alſo, thus to project our reducement. We were all in our baptiſm affianced to him, with a particular abrenunciation of the world, ſo that we cannot without the greateſt diſloyalty caſt ourſelves into its embraces; and yet when we have thus *broken the covenant of our God*, Prov. ii. 17. he does not purſue us with a jealous rage, with the ſeverity which an abuſed rivalled kindneſs would ſuggeſt; doth not give us a bill of divorce and diſclaim his relation; but contrives how he may reclaim and bring us back to himſelf. The tranſcendency of this lenity God excellently deſcribes by the prophet in the caſe of *Iſrael*, *They ſay, if a man put away his wife, and ſhe become another man's, ſhall he return unto her again? but thou haſt played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me ſaith the Lord?* Jer. iii. 1. And this, though a great height of indulgence, is no more than he daily repeats to us. After we have baſely adulterated with the world, converted our affections from God to it, he does not give us over, abandon us to our lewd courſe, and conſequent ruin; but ſtill invites our return: and leſt that

may not ſerve, he does with a great deal of holy artifice eſſay to break that accurſed league into which we are entered, pulls off the diſguiſe in which the world courted us, and makes us ſee it as it is in itſelf, a ſcene of *vanity and vexation of ſpirit*, Eccles. i. 14.

7. And as he does this in general, ſo alſo with a particular application to thoſe temporal ſatisfactions wherewith we were moſt tranſported. The things to which we are more indifferent do not ſo much endanger us; it is thoſe upon which we have more vehemently ſet our hearts, which become our ſnares, and awake his jealouſy; and accordingly we frequently ſee that it is in thoſe he chuſes to croſs us. How often does it happen that thoſe which are enamoured of themſelves, dote upon their own features, do meet with ſome diſeaſe or accident which blaſts their beauty, withers that fair flower, and makes their winter overtake their ſpring? So in our friends and relations it is uſually ſeen, we ſooneſt looſe thoſe for whom we have the greateſt, the moſt immoderate paſſion. If there be one fondling among our children, it is odds but that is taken away, or made as much the object of our grief and ſorrow, as ever it was of our joy and love. When God

ſees our hearts ſo exceſſively cleave to any tranſitory thing, he knows it is neceſſary to ſever them, for whilſt we have ſuch clogs upon us, *our ſouls will cleave to the duſt.* will not be able to ſoar up to the higheſt Region for which they are deſigned.

8. In a word, God ſo loves us, that he removes whatever he ſees will obſtruct that intimate union which he deſires with us; and ſure this is ſo obliging, that though he ſhould bid us to our loſs, tho' he could not recompence us for what he takes from us, yet we muſt be very ill-natured if we can be angry at ſo much kindneſs. But when to this is added, that all this is principally, nay, ſolely deſigned for our advantage, that God takes from us all theſe empty deluſory contentments, merely that he may inſtate us in ſolid and durable joys; we betray as much ignorance of our intereſt, as inſenſibleneſs of our obligation, if we repine that God makes us ſo much his care. It is true indeed, the things to which we have ſo inordinately adhered, do ſtick ſo cloſe, that they cannot be pulled away without ſome pain: yet for our corporal ſecurity we can endure the fundering of parts that do not only cleave, but grow to us. He

that has a gangrened member, ſuffers it to be cut off to ſave his whole body, and does not revile, but thank and reward the ſurgeon. Yet where our ſouls are concerned, and where the things have no native union with us, but are only cemented by our paſſions, we are impatient of the method, and think God deals very hardly with us, not to to let us periſh with what we love. The ſum of all is this, God, though he be abundantly condeſcending, yet he will never ſtoop ſo low as to ſhare his intereſt in us with the world: If we will devote ourſelves to it, it is not all our empty forms of ſervice will ſatisfy him; if we cannot divorce our hearts from it, he will divorce himſelf eternally from us. And the caſe being thus, we are ſurely very ill adviſed if we do not contentedly reſign ourſelves to his methods, and cheerfully endure them how ſharp ſoever. The only expedient we have for our own caſe, is to ſhorten the cure by giving our aſſiſtance, and not by ſtruggling to render it more difficult and painful. Let us entirely ſurrender our wills to him, and when we have done that, we may without much pain let him take any thing elſe. But the more difficult we find it to be diſentangled from the world, the greater ſhould our caution be againſt all future engagements to it. If our eſcape

hath been as the apoſtle ſays, *ſo as by fire*, Jude 23. with much ſmart and hazard, let us at leaſt have ſo much wit, as the common proverb allows children, and not again expoſe ourſelves; let us never glue our hearts to any external thing, but let all the concerns of the world hang looſe about us: By that means we ſhall be able to put them off inſenſibly when ever God calls for them, or perhaps we ſhall prevent his calling for them at all, it being for the moſt part our too cloſe adherence to them which prompts him to it.

9. A third advantage of affliction is, that it is a mark and ſignature of our adoption, a witneſs of our legitimation. *What ſon is he* (ſaith the apoſtle) *whom the Father chaſtiſeth not? but if ye be without chaſtiſement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye baſtards and not ſons*, Heb. xii. 7, 8. *Jacob* clad his darling *Joſeph* in a party-coloured coat, and God's favourites do here wear a livery interwoven with a mixture of dark and gloomy colours; their *long white robes* are laid up for them againſt they come to the *marriage of the Lamb*, Rev. xix. 7. Indeed we much miſtake the deſign of Chriſtianity, if we think it calls us to a condition of eaſe and ſecurity. It might ſuit well enough with

the votaries of the golden calf, to *ſit down to eat and drink, and riſe up to play*, Exod. xxxii. 6. but the diſciples of the crucified Saviour are trained to another diſcipline, our profeſſion enters us into a ſtate of warfare, and accordingly our very baptiſmal engagement runs all in military terms, and we are not only ſervants of Chriſt's family, but ſoldiers of his camp. Now we know in a war men muſt not expect to paſs their time in eaſe and ſoftneſs, but beſides all the dangers and difficulties of the combat, have many other hardſhips to endure; hunger and thirſt, heat and cold, hard lodgings and weary marches: and he that is too nice for thoſe, will not long ſtick to his colours. And it is the ſame in our ſpiritual warfare; many preſſures and ſufferings are annexed to it, and our paſſive valour is no leſs tried than our active. In reſpect of this it is that our Saviour admoniſhes his proſelytes to compute firſt the difficulties incident to their profeſſion, and that he may not enſnare us by propoſing too eaſy terms, he bids us reckon upon the worſt, and tells us, that he *that forſakes not all that he hath, ſhall not be his diſciple* Luke xiv. 26. *and that we muſt through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*, Acts xiv. 22. Indeed, it were very abſurd for us to expect eaſier conditions, when theſe

are the ſame to which our Leader has ſubmitted. The *Captain of our ſalvation was perfected by ſufferings*, Heb. ii. 10. *and if it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer before he entered into his glory*, Luke xxiv. 46. it were inſolent madneſs for us to look to be carried thither upon our beds of ivory, or from the noiſe of our harps and viols, be immediately rapt into the choir of angels.

10. This hath been ſo much conſidered by pious men, that they have looked upon their ſecular proſperities with fear and jealouſy, and many have ſolemnly petitioned for croſſes, as thinking them the neceſſary atteſtation of their ſonſhip, and means of aſſimulation to their elder brother. Why then ſhould that which is ſo deſirable to them, appear ſo formidable to us? or why ſhould we ſo vehemently deprecate what they ſo earneſtly invited? If we indeed think it a privilege to be the ſons of God, and fellow heirs with Chriſt, why do we grudge at the condition? The Roman captain tells St. *Paul*, that he obtained the immunities of a Roman *with a great ſum*, Acts xxii. 28. and ſhall we expect ſo much a nobler and more advantageous adoption perfectly gratis? Look that God ſhould change his whole economy for our eaſe, give us an eternal inhe-

ritance, discharged of those temporal incumbrances himself has annexed to it? This were sure as unjust a hope, as it would be a vain one. When *David* had that ensnared proposal made him, of being the king's son-in-law, 1 Sam. xviii. 11. he set such a value upon the dignity, that he despised the difficulty of the condition: And sure we must have very low abject souls, if when so infinitely a higher advancement is sincerely offered us, we can suffer any apprehension of hardship to divert us. In a word, let us remember that of the apostle, *if we suffer, we shall also reign with him*, 2 Tim. ii. 12. And though our afflictions be in themselves not joyous but grievous, yet when they are considered as the earnest of our future inheritance, they put on another face, and may rather enamour than frighten us.

11. A fourth advantage of afflictions is, that they excite our compassions towards others: There is nothing qualifies us so rightly to estimate the suffering of others, as the having ourselves felt them; without this our apprehensions of them are as dull and confused, as a blind man is of colours, or a deaf man of sounds. They *that stretch themselves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chaunt to*

the ſound of the viol, drink wine in bowls, and anoint themſelves with the chief ointments, will not much be grieved with the afflictions of Joſeph, Amos vi. 4, 5, 6. Nay ſo neceſſary is our experience towards our commiſeration, that we ſee it was thought a requiſite accompliſhment of our high-prieſt (that higheſt example of unbounded compaſſion) and therefore ſaith the apoſtle, *It behoved him in all things to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-prieſt in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the ſins of the people, for in that he himſelf hath ſuffered being tempted, he is able alſo to ſuccour them that are tempted*, Heb. ii. 17, 18. But if he whoſe mere ſenſe of our miſeries brought him down to us, choſe this expedient to advance his pity, how neceſſary is it to our petrified bowels? And ſince God has aſſigned our mercies to our brethren as the ſtandard by which he will proportion his to us, it is more ours than their advantage to have them enlarged; ſo that when by making us taſte of their cup, acquainting us with the bitter reliſh of their ſufferings; he prepares us to a chriſtian ſympathy with them, it is but a remoter way of obliging and qualifying us for a more ample portion of his mercy. Nay beſides the profit, there is honour accrues to us by it. Compaſſion is one of the beſt pro-

perties of our nature, and we unman ourſelves when we put it off; nay more, it is an attribute of the divinity, and the more we advance in it, the cloſer approaches we make to him. And therefore we have all reaſon to bleſs him for that diſcipline by which he promotes us in ſo excellent, ſo neceſſary a grace.

12. A fifth benefit of affliction, is, that it is an improvement of devotion, ſets us with more heartineſs to our prayers. Whilſt proſperity flows in upon us, we bathe ourſelves in its ſtreams, but are very apt to forget its ſource; ſo that God is fain to ſtop the current, leave us dry and parched, that our needs may make us do what our gratitude would not, trace our bleſſings up to the original ſpring, and both acknowledge and invoke him as the author of all our good. This effect of afflictions is obſerved by the Prophet, *Lord, in trouble have they viſited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chaſtening was upon them*, Iſa. xxvi. 16. And I believe I may appeal to every man's experience, whether his prayers be not more frequent and more hearty too, when he is under ſome diſtreſs. Then how importunate are we in our petitions? how profuſe in our vows and promiſes? ſaying with *Iſrael, Deliver us only we pray thee this day:*

and they put away the ſtrange gods from among them, and ſerved the Lord, Jud. x. 15, 16. I confeſs, it is no good indication of our temper, that we need thus to be put in the preſs e're we will yield any thing; yet ſince we are ſo diſingenuous, it is a mercy in God to adapt his methods to us, to extort when we will not give; and if he can have no free-will-offerings, yet at leaſt to exact his tribute. Nor does he deſign the effect of this ſhould ceaſe with the calamity that raiſed it, but expects our compelled addreſſes ſhould bring us into the way of voluntary ones, and happily enſnare us into piety. And indeed herein we are worſe than brutiſh if it do not. We think it a barbarous rudeneſs to engage a man in our affairs, and as ſoon as we have ſerved our own turns, never take farther notice of him. Nay indeed the very beaſts may lecture us in this piece of morality, many of them paying a ſignal gratitude, where they have received benefits; and ſhall we not come up at leaſt to their pitch! ſhall not the endearment of our deliverance bring our Deliverer into ſome repute and conſideration with us, and make us deſire to keep up an acquaintance and intercourſe with him? Yet if ingenuity work not with us, let intereſt at leaſt prevail, and the

remembrance how ſoon we may need him again, admoniſh us not to make ourſelves ſtrangers to him. God complains of *Iſrael, Wherefore ſay my people, we are Lords? we will come no more at thee*, Jer. ii. 31. A very inſolent folly to renounce that dependance by which alone they ſubſiſted, and no leſs will it be in any of us if we ſtop our recourſe to him becauſe we have had advantage by it. We have no aſſurance that the ſame occaſion ſhall not occur, but with what face can we reſume that intercourſe which in the interval we deſpiſed? So that if we have but any ordinary providence we ſhall ſtill ſo celebrate paſt reſcues, as to continue in a capacity of begging more, and then we cannot but alſo confeſs the benefit of thoſe firſt calamities which inſpirited our devotion, and taught us to pray in earneſt, and will be aſhamed that our thanks ſhould be uttered in a fainter accent than our petitions; or our daily ſpiritual concerns ſhould be more coldly ſolicited than our temporal accidental ones.

13. Nor is it only our devotion that is thus improved by our diſtreſſes, but many other graces; our faith, our hope, our patience, our Chriſtian ſufferance and fortitude. It is no triumph of faith to truſt God for thoſe good things which he gives

us in hand; this is rather to walk by ſenſe than faith; but to rely on him in the greateſt deſtitution, *and againſt hope to believe in hope*, this is the faith of a true child of *Abraham*, and will *be imputed* to us (as it was to him) *for righteouſneſs*, Rom. iv. 23, 24. So alſo our patience owes all its opportunities of exerciſe to our afflictions, and conſequently owes alſo a great part of its being to them, for we know deſuetude will loſe habits. What imaginable uſe is there of patience, where there is nothing to ſuffer? In our proſperous ſtate we may indeed employ our temperance, our humility, our caution; but patience ſeems then an uſeleſs virtue: Nay indeed, for ought we know, may be counterfeit, till adverſity bring it to the teſt. And yet this is the moſt glorious accompliſhment of a Chriſtian, that which moſt eminently conforms him to the image of his Saviour, whoſe whole life was a perpetual exerciſe of this grace; and therefore we love our eaſe too well if we are unwilling to buy this pearl at any price.

14. Laſtly, Our thankfulneſs is (at leaſt ought to be) increaſed by our diſtreſſes. It is very natural for us to reflect with value and eſteem upon thoſe bleſſings we have loſt, and we too often do

it to aggravate our diſcontent: But ſure, the moſt rational uſe of it is to raiſe our thankfulneſs for the time wherein we enjoyed them. Nay not only our former enjoyments, but even our preſent deprivations deſerve our gratitude, if we conſider the happy advantages we may reap from them. If we will perverſely caſt them away, that unworthy contempt pays no ſcores, for we ſtill ſtand anſwerable in God's account for the good he deſigned, and we might have had by it, and we become liable to a new charge for our ingratitude in thus *deſpiſing the chaſtiſement of the Lord*, Heb. xii. 5.

15. And now if all theſe benefits of afflictions (which are yet but imperfectly recited) may be thought worth conſidering, it cannot but reconcile us to the ſharpeſt of God's methods; unleſs we will own ourſelves ſuch mere animals, as to have no other apprehenſions than what our bodily ſenſes convey to us. For ſure, he that has reaſon enough to underſtand that he has an immortal ſoul, cannot but aſſent that its intereſts ſhould be ſerved, though with the diſplacency of his fleſh. Yet even in regard of that, our murmurings are oft very unjuſt, for we do many times ignorantly prejudge God's deſigns towards us even in temporals, who fre-

quently makes a little tranſient uneaſineſs, the paſſage to ſecular felicities. *Moſes* when he fled out of *Egypt*, probably little thought that he ſhould return thither a *God unto Pharaoh*, Exod. iv. 16. and as little did *Joſeph* when he was brought thither a ſlave, that he was to be a ruler there; yet as diſtant as thoſe ſtates were, the divine Providence had ſo connected them, that the one depends upon the other. And certainly we may often obſerve the like over-ruling hand in our own diſtreſſes, that thoſe events which we have entertained with the greateſt regret, have in the conſequences been very beneficial to us.

16. To conclude, we have certainly both from ſpeculation and experience, abundant matter to calm all our diſquiets, to ſatisfy our diſtruſts, and to fix in us an entire reſignation to God's diſpoſals, who has deſigns which we cannot penetrate, but none which we need fear, unleſs we ourſelves pervert them. We have our Saviour's word for it, that *he will not give us a ſtone when we aſk bread, nor a ſcorpion when we aſk a fiſh*, Matth. vii. 9. Nay his love ſecures us yet farther from the errors of our own wild choice, and does not give us thoſe ſtones and ſcorpions which we

importune for. Let us then leave our concerns to him who beſt knows them, and make it our ſole care to entertain his diſpenſations with as much ſubmiſſion and duty, as he diſpenſes them with love and wiſdom. And if we can but do ſo, we may dare all the power of earth and hell too, to make us miſerable: For be our afflictions what they can, we are ſure they are but what we in ſome reſpect or other need; be they privative or poſitive, the want of what we wiſh, or the ſuffering of what we wiſh not, they are the diſpoſals of him who cannot err, and we ſhall finally have cauſe to ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted*, Pſal. cxix. 71.

Be not diſpleas'd when the great God
Doth his afflictions ſend,
For he always conſults our good,
And ſhews himſelf our friend.

Sect. IX.

Of our Misfortunes compared with other Men's.

WE come now to impreſs an equally juſt and uſeful conſideration, the comparing of our misfortunes with thoſe of other men: and he that does that, will certainly ſee ſo little cauſe to think himſelf ſingular, that he will not find himſelf ſuperlative in calamity; for there is no man living, that can with reaſon affirm himſelf to be the very unhappieſt man, there being innumerable diſtreſſes of others which he knows not of, and conſequently cannot bring them in balance with his own. A multitude of men there are, whoſe perſons he knows not, and even of thoſe he does, he may be much a ſtranger to their diſtreſſes; many ſorrows may lie at the heart of him who carries a ſmiling face, and many a man has been an object of envy to thoſe who look but on the ſurface of his ſtate, who yet to thoſe who know his private griefs appears more worthy of compaſſion. And ſure this confuſed uncertain eſtimate of other men's afflictions, may divert us from all loud outcries of our own. *Solon* ſeeing a friend much oppreſt with grief, carried him up to a town that

overlooked the city of *Athens*, and ſhewing him all the buildings, ſaid to him, Conſider how many ſorrows have, do, and ſhall in future ages inhabit under all thoſe roofs, and do not vex thyſelf with thoſe inconveniencies which are common to mortality, as if they were only yours. And ſure it was good advice, for ſuffering is almoſt as inſeparable and adjunct of our nature, as dying is; yet we do not ſee men very apt to embitter their whole lives by the foreſight that they muſt die, but ſeeing it a thing as univerſal as inevitable, they are more forward to take up the epicure's reſolution, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, 1 Cor. xv. 32. And why ſhould we not look upon afflictions alſo as the common lot of humanity, and as we take the advantages, ſo be content to bear the incumbrances of that ſtate?

2. But beſides that allowance that is thus to be made for the unkown calamities of others, if we ſurvey but thoſe that lie open & viſible to us, the moſt of us ſhall find enough to diſcountenance our complaints. Who is there that when he moſt ſtudiouſly recollected his miſeries, may not find ſome or other that apparently equals, if not exceeds him? He that grieves at his being contemned and ſlighted, may ſee

another perſecuted and oppreſſed. He that groans under ſome ſharp pain, may ſee another afflicted with ſharper; and even he that has the moſt acute torments in his body, may ſee another more ſadly cruciated by the agonies of his mind. So that if we would but look about us, we ſhould ſee ſo many foreign occaſions of our pity, that we ſhould be aſhamed to confine it wholly to ourſelves.

3. It will perhaps be ſaid, that this cannot be univerſally true, for that there muſt in comparative degrees be ſome loweſt ſtate of mifery; I grant it, but ſtill that ſtate conſiſts not in ſuch an indiviſible point, that any one perſon can have the encloſure; or if it do, it will be ſo hard for any to diſcern who that one perſon is, that I need to deſire no fairer a compoſition, than to have every man ſuſpend his repinings, 'till he can evince his title. But alas! there are but few that can make any approaches to ſuch a pretence: For though if we advert to men's complaints, we ſhould think all degrees of compariſon were confounded, and every man were equally the greateſt ſufferer; yet certainly in the truth of things it is nothing ſo; for (not to repeat what was before mentioned, that probably no man is miſerable in any proportion to the utmoſt degree of poſſibi-

lity) the remarkably unhappy are very far the leſs number. And how paſſionately ſoever men exaggerate their calamities, yet perhaps in their ſober mood, they will ſcarce change ſtates with thoſe whom they profeſs to think happier than themſelves. It was the ſaying of Socrates, that if there were a common bank made of all men's troubles, moſt men would rather chuſe to take thoſe they brought, that to venture upon a new dividend. And indeed he had reaſon for his ſuppoſition; for conſidering how great a part of many men's afflictions are of their own making, fictitious and imaginary, they may juſtly fear leaſt they ſhould exchange feathers for lead, their own empty ſhadows for their real and preſſing calamities of others, and cannot but think it beſt to ſit down with their own, which ſerves their declamations as well, and their eaſe much better. We oft ſee men at a little miſhaping of a garment, a ſcarce diſcernable error in their cook, or their ſhorteſt interruption in their ſports, in ſuch tranſports of trouble, as if they were the moſt unfortunate men in the world; yet for all that, you ſhall hardly perſuade them to change with him whoſe courſe clothing ſuperſedes all care of the faſhion, whoſe appetite was never diſappointed for want of ſauce, and whoſe perpetual toil makes him

inſenſible what the defeat of ſport ſignifies.

4. Nay even where the exchange ſeems more equal, where the afflictions are on both ſides ſolid and ſubſtantial, yet a prudent man would ſcarce venture upon the barter. It is no ſmall advantage to know what we have to conteſt with, to have experienced the worſt of its attacks, by which we become better able to guard ourſelves: But a new evil comes with the force of a ſurpriſe, and finds us open and diſarmed. It is indeed almoſt a miraculous power that cuſtom has in reconciling us to things otherwiſe diſpleaſing; all our ſenſes are taught to remit of their adverſion by familiarity with ungrateful objects; that ugly form which at firſt makes us ſtart, by uſe diveſts its terror, and we reconcile ourſelves to harſh ſounds and ill reliſhes by long cuſtom. And ſure it has the very ſame effect upon our minds, the moſt fierce calamities do by acquaintance grow more tractable; ſo that he that exchanges an old one for a new, does but bring a wild lion into his houſe inſtead of a tame: It may for ought he knows immediately tear him in pieces, but at leaſt muſt coſt him a great deal of pains to render it gentle and familiar, and certainly no wiſe man would wiſh to make ſuch a bargain.

5. By all this it appears that how extravagantly ſoever we aggravate our own calamities and extenuate other men's, we dare not upon recollection ſtand to our own eſtimate, and what can be ſaid more in prejudice of our diſcontents? It is a granted maxim, that every man muſt have afflictions, *Man that is born of a woman*, ſays Job, *is of few years, and full of trouble*, Job xiv. 1. And we muſt reverſe God's fundamental law, before we can hope for a total exemption. All that any man can aſpire to, is to have but an equal ſhare with others, and the generality of men have ſo, at leaſt none can prove he has not ſo; and till he can, his murmurs will ſurely be very unjuſtifiable, eſpecially when they have this convincing circumſtance againſt them, that he dares not upon ſober thoughts change his afflictions with moſt of his neighbours. He is an ill member of a commnnity, who in public aſſeſſments would ſhuffle off all payments; and he is no better, who in this common tax God has laid upon our nature, is not content to bear his ſhare.

6. And truly would we but conſider that in all our ſufferings nothing befalls us but what is common to our kind, nay, which is extremely exceeded by many within the verge of our own obſervation,

we muſt be ſenſeleſly partial to be impatient. The Apoſtle thought it a competent conſolation for the firſt chriſtians, that *there had no temptation befallen them but what was common to men*, 1 Cor. x. 13. and we betray very extravagant opinions of ourſelves if it be not ſo to us. Indeed it is ſcarce poſſible for us to be ſo unſatisfied as the greateſt part of us are, did we in the comparing ourſelves with others, proceed with any tolerable ingenuity.

7. But alas we are very fallacious and deceitful in the point, we do not compare the good of others with our good, nor their evil with our evil; but with an envious curioſity we amaſs together all the deſirable circumſtances of our neighbours condition, and with as prying diſcontent we ranſack all our grievances, and confront to them. This is ſo inſincere a way of proceeding, as the moſt ordinary underſtanding can detect. If I ſhould wager that my arm were longer than another man's, and for trial meaſure my arm with his finger, he muſt be ſtupidly ſilly, that ſhould award me for it; and yet this were not a groſſer cheat, than that which we put upon ourſelves, in our compariſons with others. And it is a little ſtrange to obſerve unto what various purpoſes we

can apply this one thin piece of ſophiſtry, for when we compare our neighbours and ourſelves in point of morality, we do but reverſe the fallacy, and preſently make his vices as much exceed ours, as our calamities did his in the other inſtance. They are indeed both great violences to reaſon and juſtice, yet the latter is ſure the pleaſanter kind of deceit. A man has ſome joy in thinking himſelf leſs wicked than his neighbour, but what imaginable comfort can he take in thinking himſelf more miſerable? Certainly he that would ſubmit to a couſenage, had much better ſhift the ſcene, and think his ſufferings leſs than they are, rather than more: for ſince opinion is the thing that uſually ſets an edge upon our calamities, it might be a profitable deceit that could ſteal that from us.

8. But we need not blindfold ourſelves if we would but uſe our eyes aright, and ſee things in their true ſhapes; and if we did thus, what a ſtrange turn would there be in the common eſtimates of the world? How many of the gilded troubles of greatneſs, which men at a diſtance look on with ſo much admiration and deſire, would then be as much contemned as now they are courted? A competency would then get the better of abundance, and the now envied pomp of princes, when balanced with

the cares and hazards annexed would be ſo far from a bait, that men like *Saul*, 1 Sam. x. 22. would *hide themſelves* from the preferment; and he that underſtood the weight, would rather chuſe to wield a flail than a ſceptre: Yet ſo childiſhly are we beſotted with the glittering appearance of things, that we conclude felicity muſt needs dwell where there is a magnificent portico, and being poſſeſſed with this fancy we overlook her in our own humbler cottages, where ſhe would more conſtantly reſide, if ſhe could but find us at home; but we are commonly engaged in a rambling purſuit of her where ſhe is moſt ſeldom to be found, and in the interim, miſs of her at her own doors.

9. Indeed there is ſcarce a greater folly or unhappineſs incident to man's nature, than this fond admiration of other men's enjoyments, and contempt of our own. And whilſt we have that humour, it will ſupplant not only our preſent, but all poſſibilities of our future content: For though we could draw to ourſelves all thoſe things for which we envy others, we ſhould no ſooner have made them our own, than they will grow deſpicable and naufeous to us. This is a ſpeculation which has been atteſted by innumerable experiments, there being nothing more

frequent, than to ſee men with impatient eagerneſs, nay often with extreme hazards, purſue thoſe acqueſts, which when they have them, they are immediately ſick of. There is ſcarce any man that may not give himſelf inſtances of this in his own particular; and yet ſo fatally ſtupid are we, that no defeats will diſcipline us, or take us off from the falſe eſtimates of other men's happineſs. And truly while we ſtate our compariſons ſo unequally, they are as miſchievous as the common proverb ſtates them odious: But if we would begin at the right end, and look with as much compaſſion on the adverſities of our brethren, as we do with envy on their proſperities, every man would find cauſe to ſit down contentedly with his own burden, and confeſs that he bears but the proportionable ſhare of his common nature, unleſs perhaps it be where ſome extraordinary demerits of his own have added to the weight; and in that caſe he has more reaſon to admire his afflictions are ſo few, than ſo many. And certainly every man knows ſo many more ills by himſelf, than it is poſſible for him to do by another, that he that really ſees himſelf exceed others in his ſufferings, will find cauſe enough to think he does in ſins alſo.

10. But if we ſtretch the compariſon beyond our cotemporaries, and look back to the generations of old, we ſhall have yet farther cauſe to acknowledge God's great indulgence to us. *Abraham* though the friend of God, was not exempted from ſevere trials; he was firſt made to wander from his country, and betake himſelf to a kind of vagrant life, was a long time ſuſpended from the bleſſings of his deſired offspring, and when at laſt his beloved *Iſaac* was obtained, it cauſed a domeſtic jar, which he was fain to compoſe by the expulſion of *Iſhmael*, though his ſon alſo. But what a conteſt may we think there was in his own bowels, when that rigorous taſk was impoſed on him of ſacrificing his *Iſaac?* and though his faith glorioufly triumphed over it, yet ſure there could not be a greater preſſure upon human nature. *David* the man after God's own heart, is no leſs ſignal for his afflictions than for his piety, he was for a great while an exile from his country, and (which he moſt bewailed) from the ſanctuary, by the perſecutions of *Saul:* and after he was ſettled in that throne to which God's immediate aſſignation had entitled him, what a ſucceſſion of calamities had he in his own family? the inceſtuous rape of his daughter, the retalia-

tion of that by the unnatural murder of *Amnon*, and that seconded by another no less barbarous conspiracy of *Absalom* against himself, his expulsion from *Jerusalem*, the base revilings of *Shimei*, and finally the loss of that darling son in the act of his sin. A cluster of afflictions, in comparison whereof the most of ours are but like the *gleanings* (as the prophet speaks) *after the vintage is done*. It were indeed endless to instance in all the several forefathers of our faith before Christ's incarnation, the apostle gives us a brief, but very comprehensive compendium of their sufferings, *They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth*, Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38. And if we look on the primitive Christians, we shall see them perfectly the counterpart to them, their privileges consisted not in any immunities from calamities; for their whole lives were scenes of sufferings. St. *Paul* gives us an account of his own, *In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in*

deaths oft: of the Jews five times received I forty ſtripes ſave one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I ſtoned, thrice I ſuffered ſhipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeying often, &c. 2 Cor. xi. 23. And if his ſingle hardſhips roſe thus high, what may we think the whole ſum of all his fellow-labourers amounted to together, with that noble army of martyrs who ſealed their faith with their blood; of whoſe ſufferings eccleſiaſtic hiſtory gives us ſuch aſtoniſhing relations.

11. And now being compaſſed about with ſo great a cloud of witneſſes, the apoſtle's inference is very irrefragable, *let us run with patience the race which is ſet before us*, Heb. xii. 1, 2. But yet it is more ſo, if we proceed on to that conſideration he adjoins, *Looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame*, verſe 3. Indeed if we contemplate him in the whole courſe of his life, we ſhall find him rightly ſtiled by the prophet *a man of ſorrows*, Iſai. liii. 3. And as if he had charged himſelf with all our griefs as well as our ſins, there is ſcarce any human calamity which we may not find exemplified in him. Does any complain of the lowneſs and poverty of

his condition? alas! his whole life was a ſtate of indigence. He was forced to be an inmate with the beaſts, he laid in a ſtable at his birth, and after himſelf profeſſes that he *had not where to lay his head*, Luke ix. 58. Is any oppreſt with infamy and reproach? he may ſee his ſavior accuſed as a *glutton and a wine-bibber*, Luke vii. 34. *a blaſphemer*, John x. 33. *a ſorcerer*, Mat. xii. 24. *a perverter of the nation*, Luke xxiii. 2. Yea, to ſuch a ſordid lowneſs had they ſunk his repute, that a ſeditious thief and murderer was thought the more eligible perſon, *not this man but Barabbus*, John xviii. 40. And finally all this ſcene of indignities cloſed with the ſpiteful pageantry of *mockery* acted by the ſoldiers *Mat.* xxvii. 28. and the yet more barbarous inſultings of prieſts and ſcribes, verſe 41. Is any man deſpiſed or deſerted by his friends? he was contemned by his countrymen, thought frantic by his friends, betrayed by one of his diſciples, abandoned by all, unleſs that one who followed him longeſt, to renounce him the more ſhamefully by a threefold abjuration. Nay what is infinitely more than this, he ſeemed deſerted by God alſo, as is witneſſed by that doleful exclamation, *My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me?* Mat. xxvii. 46. Is any diſſatisfied with his hardſhips or laborioufneſs of his

life? let him remember his saviour's was not a life of delicacy or ease: He was never entered in those academies of luxury, where men are *gorgeously apparel'd and live delicately*, Luke vii. 25. but he was brought up under the mean roof of a carpenter, and consequently subjected to all the lowness of such an education. His initiation to his prophetic office was with the miraculous severity of a forty days fast, and in his discharge of it, we find him in perpetual labours, *going about doing good*, Acts x. 38. and that not in triumph, like a prince bestowing his gifts, but in wearisome travels; never riding but once, and that only upon a borrowed beast, *and to fulfil a prophecy*, Mat. xxi. 4. 5. Does any man groan under sharp and acute pains? let him consider what his redeemer endured, how in his infancy, at his circumcision he offered the first fruits, as an earnest of that bloody vintage when *he trod the wine press alone*, Isai. lxiii. 3. Let him attend him through all the stages of direful passion, and behold his arms pinioned with rough cords, his head smote with a reed, and torn with his crown of thorns, his back ploughed with those *long furrows*, (Psal. cxx. 3.) the scourges had made; his macerated feeble body oppressed with the weight of his cross, and at last racked and extended on it; his hands

and feet, thoſe nervous and conſequently moſt ſenſible parts tranſsfixed with nails, his whole body faſtened to that accurſed tree, and expoſed naked to the air in a cold ſeaſon; his throat parched with thirſt and yet more afflicted with that vinegar and gall wherewith they pretended to relieve him; and finally his life expiring amidſt the full ſenſe of theſe accurate torments. Laſtly, does any man labour under the bittereſt of all ſorrows, importunate temptations to, or a wounded ſpirit for ſin? even here alſo he may find that he has an *high prieſt who hath been touched with the ſenſe of his infirmities*, Heb. iv. 15. He was violently aſſaulted with a ſucceſſion of temptations, Mat. iv. and we cannot doubt but Satan would on him employ the utmoſt of hit ſkill. Nor was he leſs oppreſſed with the burden of his ſin, (ours I mean) though not his own. What may we think were his apprehenſions in the garden, when he ſo earneſtly deprecated that which was his whole errand into the world? What a dreadful preſſure was that, wrung from him that bloody ſweat, and caſt him into that inexplicable agony, the horrow whereof was beyond the comprehenſion of any but his who felt it? and finally how amazing was the ſenſe of divine wrath, which extorted that ſtupendous complaint, that ſtrong cry on the croſs,

Heb. v. 7. the ſharp accent whereof, if it do aright ſound on our hearts, muſt certainly quite overwelm our loudeſt groans? and now certainly I may ſay with Pilate, Ecce homo, behold the man, or rather with a more divine author, Behold *If ever there were ſorrows like unto his ſorrow*, Lam. i. 12.

12. And ſure it were but a reaſonable inference, that which we find made by Chriſt himſelf, *if theſe things be done in a green tree, what ſhall be done in the dry?* Luke xxiii. 31. If an imputative guilt could nouriſh ſo ſcorching a flame, pull down ſo ſevere a wrath, what can we expect who are merely made up of combuſtible matter, whoſe proper perſonal ſins cry for vengeance? Sure were we to judge by human meaſures, we ſhould reckon to have more than a double portion of our Saviour's ſufferings entailed upon us: yet ſuch is the efficacy of his, that they have commuted for ours, and have left us only ſuch a ſhare, as may evidence our relation to our crucified Lord; ſuch as may ſerve only for badges and cognizances to whom we pertain. For alas! let the moſt afflicted of us weigh our ſorrows with his, how abſurdly unequal will the compariſon appear? And therefore as the beſt expedient to baſile our mutinies, to ſhame us

out of our repinings, let us often draw this uneven parallel, confront our petty uneaſineſs with his unſpeakable torments; and ſure it is impoſſible but our admiration and gratitude muſt ſupplant our impatience.

13. This is indeed the method to which the Apoſtle directs us, *Conſider him that endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye be weary and faint in your minds, ye have not yet reſiſted unto blood*, Heb. xii. 3. Was he contradicted, and ſhall we expect to be humoured and complied with? Did he reſiſt to blood, and ſhall we think thoſe preſſures intolerable, with force only a few tears from us? This is ſuch an unmanly niceneſs, as utterly makes us unfit to follow the captain of our ſalvation. What a ſoldier is he like to make, that will take no ſhare of the hazards and hardſhips of his general? Honeſt *Uriah* would not take the lawful ſolaces of his own houſe, upon the conſideration that his lord *Joab* though but his fellow ſubject) *lay encamped in the open fields*, 2 Sam. xi. 11. yea though he was ſent by him from the camp. And ſhall we baſely forſake ours in purſuit of our eaſe? He is of a dangerous ſpirit, whom the example of his ſuperior will not animate. *Plutarch* tells us, that *Cato* march-

ing thro' the deſarts, was ſo diſtreſt for water, that a ſmall quantity was brought to him in a helmet as a great prize, which he refuſing becauſe he could not help his ſoldiers to the like, they were ſo tranſported with that generoſity, that it extinguiſhed the ſenſe of their thirſt, and they were aſhamed to complain of what their leader voluntarily endured for their ſakes. And ſurely we extremely diſcredit our inſtitution, if we cannot equal their ingenuity; and follow ours with as great alacrity through all the difficulties he has traced before us, and for us.

14. Nor let us think to excuſe ourſelves upon the impotency of our fleſh, which wants the aſſiſtance which his divinity gave him: For that plea is ſuperſeded by the fore-mentioned examples of the ſaints, men of like paſſions with us, who not only patiently, but joyfully endured all tribulations; by which it appears it is not impoſſible to our nature, with thoſe aids of grace which are common to us with them: for certainly the difference between them and us, is not ſo much in the degrees of the aids, as in the diligence of employing them. Let us therefore, as the apoſtle adviſes, *lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees*, Heb. xii. 12. and with a noble emulation follow thoſe heroic pat-

terns they have ſet us. And ſince we ſee that even thoſe favourites of heaven, have ſmarted ſo ſeverely, let us never dream of an immunity; but when ever we find ourſelves inclining to any ſuch flattering hope, let every one of us upbraid ourſelves in thoſe terms the Jews did our Saviour, *Art thou greater than Abraham, and the Prophets, whom makeſt thou thyſelf?* John viii. 53. Nay we may deſcend lower and take in not only all the inferior ſaints of former times, but all thoſe our contemporaries in ſufferings, which are the moſt within our view, and may aſk the apoſtles queſtion, *What then? are we better than they?* Rom. iii. 9. If we think we are, it is certain we are ſo much worſe by that inſolence; and if we confeſs we are not, upon what ſcore can we pretend to be better treated? To conclude, let us not pore only upon our peculiar evils, but attentively look about us, and conſider what others endure: and ſince in frolics we can ſport ourſelves with many uneaſineſſes for company ſake, let us not be more puſillanimous in our ſoberer moods, but every man cheerfully take his turn in bearing the common burden of mortality, till we put off both it and its appendages together, when this mortal ſhall put on immortality, 1 *Cor.* xv. 54.

Compare your troubles with the Saints,
In ages long before,
All murmuring will fly away,
You'll the good God adore.

Compare your troubles with your Lord,
And Saints of old renown'd,
Your murmurings will then ſoon ceaſe;
'Till you with them are crown'd.

Sect. X.

Of particular Aids for the gaining of Contentment.

WE have now paſſed through all thoſe conſiderations we at firſt propoſed, and may truſt the conſidering reader to make his own collections: yet becauſe impatience is the vice that has been all this while arraigned, I am to foreſee if poſſible, that thoſe who have the greateſt degree of that, may be the leaſt willing to attend the whole proceſs; and therefore I think it may not be amiſs, for their eaſe to ſuit and reduce all into ſome ſhort directions and rules for the acquiring contentment.

2. The firſt and moſt fundamental is, the mortifying our pride, which as it is the ſeminary of moſt ſins, ſo eſpecially this of repining. Men that are highly opinioned of themſelves are commonly unſatisfiable: For how well ſoever they are treated, they ſtill think it ſhort of their merits. Princes have often experimented this in thoſe who have done them ſignal ſervices; but God finds it in thoſe who have done him none, and we expect he ſhall diſpenſe to us according to thoſe falſe eſtimates we put upon ourſelves. Therefore he that aſpires to content, muſt firſt take truer meaſures of himſelf, and conſider that as he was nothing till God gave him a being, ſo all that he can produce from that being, is God's by original right, and therefore can pretend to nothing of reward; ſo that whatever he receives, is ſtill upon the account of a new bounty; and to complain that he has no more, is like the murmurs of an unthankful debtor, who would ſtill increaſe thoſe ſcores which he knows he can never pay.

3. In the ſecond place, let every man conſider how many bleſſings (notwithſtanding his having no claim to any) he daily enjoys; and whether thoſe he ſo impatiently raves after, be not much inferior

to them. Nay let him ask his own heart whether he would quit all those he has, for them he wants; and if he would not (as I suppose no man in his wits would, those wits being part of the parter) let him then judge how unreasonable his repinings are, when himself confesses he has the better part of worldly happiness, and never any man living had all.

4. In the third place therefore let him secure his duty of thankfulness for those good things he hath, and that will insensibly undermine his impatiencies for the rest, it being impossible to be at once thankful and murmuring. To this purpose it were very well, if he would keep a solemn catalogue of all the bounties, protections, and deliverances he has received from God's hand, and every night examine what accessions that day has brought to the sum: And he that did this, would undoubtedly find so many incitations to gratitude, that all those to discontent would be stifled in the croud. And since acknowledgement of God's mercies is all the tribute he exacts for them, we must certainly look on that as an indispensable duty: And therefore he that finds that God shortens his hand, stops the efflux of his bounty towards

him, ſhould reflect on himſelf whether he be not behind in that homage by which he holds, and have not by his unthankfulneſs *turned away good things from him*, Iſai. lix. 1. And if he find it ſo (as who alas is there that may not!) he cannot ſure for ſhame complain, but muſt in prudence reinforce his gratitude for what is left, as the beſt means to recover what he has loſt.

5. But his murmurs will yet be more amazingly ſilenced, if in the fourth place he compares the good things he enjoys with the ill he has done. Certainly this is a moſt infallible cure for our impatiencies, the holieſt man living being able to accuſe himſelf of ſuch ſins, as would according to all human meaſures of equity forfeit all bleſſings, and pull down a greater weight of judgment than the moſt miſerable groan under. Therefore as before I adviſed to keep a catalogue of benefits received, ſo here it would be of uſe to draw up one of ſins committed. And doubtleſs he that confronts the one with the other, cannot but be aſtoniſhed to find them both ſo numerous, equally wondering at God's mercy in continuing his bleſſings, in deſpite of all his provocations, and at his own baſeneſs in continuing his provocations in deſpite of all thoſe

bleſſings. Indeed it is nothing but our affected ignorance of our own demerits, that makes it poſſible for us to repine under the ſevereſt of God's diſpenſations. Would we but ranſack our hearts, and ſee all the abominations that lie there, nay would the moſt of us but recollect thoſe barefaced crimes which even the world can witneſs againſt us, we ſhould find more than enough to balance the heavieſt of our preſſures. When therefore by our impatient ſtrugglings we fret and gall ourſelves under our burdens, let us interrogate our ſouls in the words of the prophet, *Why doth a living man complain, a man for the puniſhment of his ſin?* Let us not ſpend our breath in murmurs and outcries, which will only ſerve to provoke more ſtripes: But *let us ſearch and try our ways, and* turn *again to the Lord*, Lam. iii. 39, 43. diligently ſeek out *that accurſed thing* which has cauſed our diſcomfiture, and by the removal of that, prepare the way for the acceſs of mercy. But alas how prepoſterous a method do we take in our afflictions! We accuſe every thing but what we ought, furiouſly fly at all the ſecond cauſes of our calamity, nay too often at the firſt, by impious diſputes of providence, and in the mean time, as *Job* ſpeaks, *the root of the matter is found in us*, Job xix. 28. We ſhelter and pro-

tect in our boſoms the real author of our miſeries. The true way then to allay the ſenſe of our ſufferings, is to ſharpen that of our ſins. The prodigal thought the meaneſt condition in his father's family a preferment, *Make me one of thy hired ſervants*, Luke xv. 19. And if we have his penitence, we ſhall have his ſubmiſſion alſo, and calmly attend God's diſpoſals of us.

6. As every man in his afflictions is to look inward on his own heart, ſo alſo upward and conſider by whoſe providence all events are ordered. *Is there any evil* (*i. e.* of puniſhment) *in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* Amos iii. 6. and what are we worms that we ſhould diſpute with him? Shall a man contend with his maker? Let the *potſherd ſtrive with the potſherds of the earth*, Iſa. xlv. 9. And as his power is not to be controlled, ſo neither is his juſtice to be impeached, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Gen. xviii. 25. And where we can neither reſiſt nor appeal, what have we to do but humbly to ſubmit? Nor are we only compelled to it by neceſſity, but induced and invited by intereſt, ſince his diſpenſations are directed not barely to aſſert his dominion, but to evidence his paternal care over us. He diſcerns our needs, and accord-

ingly applies to us. The benignity of his nature permits him not to take delight in our diſtreſſes, *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*, Lam. iii. 33. and therefore whenever he adminiſters to us a bitter cup, we may be ſure the ingredients are medicinal, and ſuch as our infirmities require. He dares not truſt our intemperate appetites with unmixed proſperities, the luſciouſneſs whereof, though it may pleaſe our palates, yet like St. *John's* book, Rev. x. 9. that *honey in the mouth may prove gall in the bowels*, ingender the moſt fatal diſeaſes. Let us therefore in our calamities *not conſult with fleſh and blood*, Gal. i. 16. (which the more it is bemoaned, the more it complains) but look to the hand that ſtrikes; and aſſure ourſelves, that the ſtripes are not more ſevere, than he ſees neceſſary to our good: And ſince they are ſo, they ought in reaſon to be our choice as well as his; and not only religion, but ſelf-love will prompt us to ſay, with old *Ely*, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good*. 1 Sam. iii. 18. But alas! we do not underſtand what is our intereſt; becauſe we do not rightly underſtand what we are ourſelves. We conſider ourſelves merely in our animal being, our bodies and thoſe ſenſitive faculties veſted in them, and when we are invaded there, we think we are undone, though

that breach be only to relieve that diviner part within us, beſieged and oppreſſed with the fleſh about it, (for ſo God knows it too often is) or if we do not conſider it in that notion of an enemy, yet at the utmoſt eſtimate, the body is to the ſoul but as the garment to the body, a decent caſe to cover: Now what man (not ſtark frantic) would rather have his clothes cut than his fleſh? and then by the rate of proportion, we may well queſtion our own ſobriety, when we repine that our ſouls are ſecured at the coſt of our bodies, and that is certainly the worſt, the unkindeſt deſign; and our impatient reſiſtances ſerve only to fruſtrate the kind, and medicinal part of affliction, but will not at all reſcue us from the ſevere. Our murmurings may ruin our ſouls, but will never avert any of our outward calamaties.

7. A ſeventh help to contentment is to have a right eſtimate of the world, and the common ſtate of humanity: To conſider the world but as a ſtage and ourſelves but as actors, and to reſolve that it is very little material, what part we play ſo we do it well. A comedian may get as much applauſe by acting the ſlave as the conquerer, and he that acts the one to day, may to-morrow reverſe the part, and perſonate the other. So great are the viciſſitudes of the world, that there is no building any

firm hopes upon it. All the certainty we have of it, is, that in every condition it has its uneaſineſs; ſo that when we court a change, we rather ſeek to vary than end our miſeries. And certainly he that has well impreſſed upon his mind the vanity and vexation of the world, cannot be much ſurpriſed at any thing that befalls him in it. We expect no more of any thing but to do its kind, and we may as well be angry that we cannot bring the lions to our cribs, or fix the wind to a certain point, as that we cannot ſecure ourſelves from dangers and diſappointments, in this rough and mutable world. We are therefore to lay it as an infallible maxim, that in this vale of tears every man muſt meet with ſorrows and diſaſters: And then ſure we may take our peculiar with evenneſs of temper, as being but the natural conſequent of our being men. And tho' poſſibly we may every one think himſelf to have a double portion, yet that is uſually from the deceitful compariſon we make of ourſelves with others. We take the magnifying glaſſes of diſcontent and envy, when we view our own miſeries and others felicities, but look on our enjoyments and their ſufferings through the contracting optics of ingratitude and incompariſon: And whilſt we do thus, it is impoſſible but we muſt foment our own diſſatisfactions.

He that will compare to good purpose, muſt do it honeſtly and ſincerely, and view his neighbors calamaties with the ſame attention he does his own, and his own comforts with the ſame he does his neighbors; and then many of the great ſeeming inequalities would come pretty near a level.

8. But even where they do not, it in the eighth place deſerves however to be conſidered how illnatured a thing it is, for any man to think himſelf more miſerable becauſe another is happy; and yet this is the very thing, by which alone many men have made themſelves wretched: For many have created wants, merely from the envious contemplation of other men's abundance. And indeed there is nothing more diſingenuous, or (to go higher) more diabolical. Lucifer was happy enough in his original ſtate, yet could not think himſelf ſo, becauſe he was *not like the moſt high*, Iſa. xiv. 14. And when by that inſolent ambition he had forfeited bliſs, it has ever ſince been an aggravation of his torment, that mankind is aſſumed to a capacity of it; and accordingly he makes it the deſign of his envious induſtry to defeat him. Now how perfectly are the two firſt parts of this copy tranſcribed, by thoſe who firſt cannot be ſatisfied with any inferior

degree of prosperity, and then whet their impatience with other mens enjoyments of what they cannot attain? And it is much to be doubted, that they who go thus far may complete their parallel, and endeavor when they have opportunity to undermine that happiness they envy. Therefore since Satan is so apt to impress his whole image, where he has drawn any lineament, it concerns us warily to guard ourselves, and by a christian sympathy with our brethren, *rejoice with them that do rejoice*, Rom. xii. 15. make the comforts of others an allay, not an improvement of our own miseries. Charity has a strange magnetic power, and attracts the concerns of our brethren to us, and he that has that in his breast can never want refreshment, whilst any about him are happy; for by adopting their interest, he shares in their joys. *Jethro*, though an alien, *rejoiced for all the good God had done to Israel*, Exod. xviii. 9. and why should not we have as sensible a concurrence with our fellow christians? And he that has so, will still find something to balance his own sufferings.

9. Let him that aspires to contentment set bounds to his desire. It is our common fault in this affair, we usually be-

at the wrong end, we *enlarge our deſires as hell, and cannot be ſatisfied*, Hab. ii. 5. and then think God uſes us ill, if he do not fill our inſatiable appetites; Whereas if we would confine our expectations to thoſe things which we need, or he has promiſed, there are few of us who would not find them abundantly anſwered. Alas! how few things are there which our nature (if not ſtimulated by fancy and luxury) requires? And how rare is it to find them who want thoſe? Nay who have not many additionals for delight and pleaſure? And yet God's promiſe under the goſpel extends only to thoſe neceſſaries; for when Chriſt aſſures his diſciples that *theſe things ſhall be added unto them*, Mat. vi. 33. the content apparently reſtrains *theſe things* to meet and drink and cloathing. Therefore take *no thought for the life what you ſhall eat, or what you drink, nor yet for the body what you ſhall put on*, verſe 25. now what pretence have we to claim more than our charter makes us? God never articled with the ambitious to give him honors, or with the covetous to fill his bags, or with the voluptuous to feed his luxuries. Let us therefore, if we expect to be ſatisfied, modeſtly confine our deſires within the limits he has ſet us: And then every acceſſion which he ſuperadds will appear (what it is) a mercy: and

bounty. But whilſt our appetites are boundleſs, and rather ſtretched than filled with our acqueſts, what poſſibility is there of their ſatisfaction? And when we importune God for it, we do but aſſign him ſuch a taſk the poets made a repreſentation of their hell, the filling a ſieve with water, or the rolling a ſtone up a precipice.

10. A great expedient for contentment, is to confine our thoughts to the preſent, and not to let them looſe to future events. Would we but do this, we might ſhake off a great part of our burden: For we often heap fantaſtic loads upon ourſelves by anxious preſages of things which perhaps will never happen, and yet ſink more under them, than under the real weight that is actually upon us; and this is certainly one of the greateſt follies imaginable; for either the evil will come or it will not; if it will, it is ſure no ſuch deſirable gueſt that we ſhould go out to meet it, we ſhall feel it time enough when it falls on us, we not project to anticipate our ſenſe of it; but if it will not, what extreme madneſs is it for a man to torment himſelf with that which will never be, to create engines of tortures, and by ſuch æriel afflictions, make himſelf as miſerable as the moſt real ones could do? and truly this

is all that we usually get by our foresights. Provision is one of God's attributes, and he mocks all our pretences to it, by a frequent defeating of all our fore-casts. He does it often in our hopes: some little cross circumstance many times demolishes those goodly machines we raise to ourselves; and he does it no less in our fears: Those ills we solemnly expected often baulk us, and others from an unexpected coast suddenly invade us. And since we are so blind, so short-sighted, let us never take upon us to be scouts, to discover danger at a distance (for it is manifold odds we shall only bring home false alarms) but let us rest ourselves upon that most admirable maxim of our blessed Lord, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*, Mat. vi. 34. apply ourselves with Christian courage to bear the present, and leave God either to augment or diminish, as he sees fit, for the future. Or if he will needs be looking forward, let it be in obedience not in contradiction to our duty; let us entertain ourselves with those futurities which we are sure are not chimeras, death and judgment, heaven and hell. The nearer we draw these things to our view, the more insensible will all intermediate objects be; they will deceive our sense of present, and much more forestall the apprehension of future evils: For it is our

neglect of things eternal, that leaves us thus at leisure for the transitory.

11. In the last place, let us in all our distresses supersede our anxieties and solicitudes by that most effectual remedy the apostle prescribes, *Is any man afflicted let him pray*, Jam. v. 13. And this sure is a most rational prescription: For alas! what else can we do towards the redress of our griefs. We who are so impotent, that we have not power over the most despicable excrescence of our own body, cannot make *one hair white or black*, Matth. v. 36. what can we do towards the new moulding our condition, or modelling things without us? Our solicitudes serve only to bind our burdens faster upon us, but this expedient of prayer will certainly relieve us, *Call upon me*, says God, *in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt praise me*, Psal. l. 15. Whenever therefore we are sinking in the floods of affliction, let us thus support ourselves by representing our wants unto our gracious Lord, cry unto him as St. *Peter* did, *Lord save me*, Matt. xiv. 30. and he will take us by the hand, and be the winds never so boisterous or contrary, preserve us from sinking: The waves and billows of this troublesome world will serve but to toss

us closer into his arms, who can with a word appease the roughest tempest, or rescue us from it. Oh let us not then be so unkind to ourselves, as to neglect this infallible means of our deliverance! but with the psalmist take our refuge under the *shadow of the divine wings till the calamity be over past*, Psal. lvii. 1. And as this is a sure expedient in all our real important afflictions, so is it a good test by which to try what are so. We are often peevish and disquieted at trifles, nay we take up the quarrels of our lusts and vice, and are discontented when they want their wished supplies. Now in either of these cases, no man that at all considers who he prays to, will dare to insert these in his prayers, it being a contempt of God to invoke him in things so slight as the one, or impious as the other. It will therefore be good for every man when he goes to address for relief, to consider what of his pressures they are that are worthy of that solemn deprecation: and when he has singled those out, let him reflect, and he will find he has in that prejudged all his other discontents as frivolous or wicked. And then sure he cannot think fit to harbour them, but must for shame dismiss them, since they are such as he dare not avow to him from whom alone he can expect relief. God always pities our real mise-

ries, but our imaginary ones dare not demand it. Let us not then create ſuch diſeaſes to ourſelves, as we cannot declare to our phyſician: and when thoſe are excluded, for all the reſt St. *Paul*'s receipt is an univerſal medicine, *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayers and ſupplications, with thankſgiving, let your requeſts be made known to God*, Phil. 4. 6.

If you would baniſh ſelf-conceit,
And grudgings of whatever kind,
Then God would in his mercy great,
Bleſs you with a contented mind.

But if that you repine and grudge
At what misfortunes come your way,
Then God who is our righteous judge
Will add afflictions every day.

Sect. XI.

Of Reſignation.

AND now amidſt ſuch a variety of receipts, it will be hard to inſtance any one ſort of calamity which can eſcape their efficacy, if they be but duly applied. But indeed we have generally a compendious way of fruſtrating all remedies by never making uſe of them: Like fantaſtic patients we are well enough content to have our diſeaſe diſcourſed, and medicines preſcribed, but when the phyſic comes, have ſtill ſome pretence or other to protract the taking it. But I ſhall beſeech the reader to conſider, that counſels are not charms, to work without any co-operation of the concerned perſon: They muſt be adverted to, they muſt be pondered and conſidered, and finally they muſt be practiſed, or elſe the utmoſt good they can do us, is to give us a few hours divertiſement in the reading. But they do us a miſchief that infinitely outweighs it, for they improve our guilts by the ineffective tender they make of reſcuing us from them, and leave us accountable not only for the original crimes, but for our obſtinate adheſion to them in ſpite of admonition.

2. I ſay this becauſe it is a little too notorious, that many take up books only as they do cards or dice, as an inſtrument of diverſion. It is a good entertainment of their curioſity to ſee what can be ſaid upon any ſubject, and be it well or ill-handled, they can pleaſe themſelves equally with the ingenuity or rediculouſneſs of the compoſure, and when they have done this, they have done all they deſigned. This indeed may be tolerable in romances and play-books, but ſure it ill benefits divinity. And yet I fear it oftenest happens there: for in the former ſome do project for ſome trivial improvements, as the embelliſhing of their ſtile, the inſpiriting of their fancies; and ſome men would ſcarce be able to drive their pedling trade of wit, did they not thus ſweep the ſtage: but alas! how many books of piety are read, of which one cannot diſcern the leaſt tincture in men's converſations, which ſure does in a great meaſure proceed from the want of a determinate deſign in their reading, men's practice being not apt to be leſs rovers than their ſpeculation. He that takes a practical ſubject in hand, muſt do it with a deſign to conform his practice to what he ſhall there be convinced to be his duty, and he that comes not with this probity of mind, is not like to be much benefited by his reading.

3. But one would think this ſhould be an unneceſſary caution at this time, for ſince the intent of this tract, is only to ſhew men the way to contentment, it is to be ſuppoſed the readers will be as much in earneſt as the writer can be, it being every man's proper and moſt important intereſt, the inſtating him in the higheſt and moſt ſupreme felicity that this world can admit: yet for all this fair probability, I doubt many will in this inſtance have the ſame indifference they have in their other ſpiritual concerns.

4. It is true indeed that a querelous repining humour, is one of the moſt pernicious, the moſt ugly habits incident to mankind; but yet, as deformed people are oft the moſt in love with themſelves, ſo this crooked piece of our temper is of all others the moſt indulgent to itſelf. Melancholy, is the moſt ſtubborn and untractable of all humours; and diſcontent being the offspring of that, partakes of that inflexibility, and accordingly we ſee how impregnable it often is, againſt all aſſaults of reaſon and religion too. Jonah in a ſullen mood would juſtify his diſcontent even to God himſelf, and in ſpite of that calm reproof, *Doſt thou well to be angry?* declares, *he did well to be angry even to the death*, Jonah iv. 9. And do we not fre-

quently see men upon an impatience of some disappointment, grow angry even at their comforts? Their friends, their children, their meat, their drink, every thing grows nauseous to them, and in a frantic discontent, they often fling away those things which they most value. Besides, this peevish impatience is of so aerial a diet, that it is scarce possible to starve it. It will nourish itself phantasms and chimeras, suborn a thousand surmises and imaginary distresses to abet its pretences: and though every one of us can remonstrate to another, the unreasonableness of this discontent; yet scarce any one of us will draw the argument home, or suffer ourselves to be convinced by what we urge as irrefragable to others. Nay, farther, this humour is impatient of any diversion, loves to converse only with itself. In bodily pains, men that despair of cure are yet glad of allays and mitigations, and strive by all arts, to divert and deceive the sense of their anguish; but in this disease of the mind, men cherish and improve their torment, roll and chew the bitter pill in their mouths, that they may be sure to have its utmost flavor; and by devoting all their thoughts to the subject of their grief, keep up an uninterrupted sense of it: as if they had the same tyranny for themselves which *Caligula* had for others, and

loved to feel themſelves die. Indeed, there is not a more abſurd contradiction in the world, than to hear men cry out, of the weight, the intolerableneſs of their burden, and yet graſp it as faſt as if their life were bound up in it; will not depoſit it, no not for the ſmalleſt breathing time. A ſtrange faſcination ſure, and yet ſo frequent, that it ought to be the fundamental care of him that would cure men of their diſcontents, to bring them to a herty willingneſs of being cured.

5. It may be, this will look like paradox, and every man will be apt to ſay he wiſhes nothing more in earneſt, than to be cured of his preſent diſcontent. He that is poor would be cured by wealth, he that is low and obſcure by honour and greatneſs: But ſo an hydropic perſon may ſay he deſires to have his thirſt cured by a perpetual ſupply of drink: yet all ſober people know, that this is the way only to encreaſe it; but let the whole habit of the body be rectified, and then the thirſt will ceaſe of itſelf. And certainly it is the very ſame in the preſent caſe: No outward acceſſions will ever ſatisfy our cravings, our appetites muſt be tamed and reduced, and then they will never be able to ariſe tumults, or put us into mutiny or diſcontent; and he (and none but he) that ſub-

mits to this method, can truly be ſaid to deſire a cure.

6. But he that thus atteſts the reality of his deſires, and ſeeks contentment in its proper ſphere, may ſurely arrive to ſome conſiderable degrees of it. We find in all ages men that only by the direction of natural light have calmed their diſquiets, and reaſoned themſelves into contentment, even under great and ſenſible preſſures; men who amidſt the acuteſt torments have ſtill preſerved a ſerenity of mind, and have fruſtrated contempts and reproaches by diſregarding them: and ſure we give a very ill account of our Chriſtianity, if we cannot do as much with it, as they did without it.

7. I do not here propoſe ſuch a ſtoical inſenſibility as makes no diſtinction of events, which, though it has been vainly pretended to by many, yet ſure was never attained by any upon the ſtrength of diſcourſe. Some natural dullneſs or caſual ſtupifaction muſt concur to that, and perhaps by doing ſo, has had the luck to be canonized for virtue. I mean only ſuch a ſuperiority of mind as raiſes us above our ſufferings though it exempts us not from the ſenſe of them. We cannot pur-

poſe to ourſelves a higher pattern in any virtue than our bleſſed Lord: Yet we ſee he not only felt that load under which he lay, but had the moſt pungent and quick ſenſe of it, ſuch as prompted thoſe earneſt deprecations, *Father, if it be poſſible let this cup paſs:* Yet all thoſe diſplacencies of his fleſh were ſurmounted by the reſignation of his ſpirit, *nevertheleſs not what I will but what thou wilt*, Luke xii. 42. And certainly he that in imitation of this pattern does in ſpite of all the reluctancies of his ſenſe, thus entirely ſubmit his will however he may be ſad, yet he is not impatient; nor is he like to be ſad long, for to him that is thus reſigned, *light will ſpring up*, Pſal. xcvii. 11. ſome good angel will be ſent like that to our Saviour to relieve his diſconſolation. God will ſend either ſome outward allays, or give ſuch interior comforts and ſupports, as ſhall counterpoiſe thoſe afflictions he takes not off.

8. Indeed the grand deſign of God in correcting us, is (the ſame with that of a prudent parent towards his child) to break our wills. That ſtubborn faculty will ſcarce bend with eaſy touches, and therefore does require ſome force: And when by that rougher handling, he has brought it to a pliantneſs, the work is done. It is therefore our intereſt to co-operate with

this design, to assist as much as we are able towards the subjugating this unruly part of ourselves. This is that *Sheba*, 2 Sam. xx. 22. the surrendering of whom is God's expectation in all the close sieges he lays to us. Let us then be so wise, as by an early resigning it to divert his further hostilities, and buy our peace with him.

9. And truly this is the way not only to gain peace with him, but ourselves too: It is the usurpation of our will over our reason which breeds all the confusion and tumults within our own breasts, and there is no possibility of curbing its insolence, but by putting it into safe custody, committing it to him who (as our church teaches us) alone can order the unruly wills of sinful men. Indeed nothing but experience can fully inform us of the serenity and calm of that soul who has resigned his will to God. All care of chusing for himself is happily superseded, he is tempted to no anxious forecasts for future events, for he knows nothing can happen in contradiction of that supreme will, in which he hath sanctuary: Which will certainly chuse for him with that tenderness and regard, that a faithful guardian would for his pupil, or an indulgent father for his child that casts itself into his arms.

Certainly there is not in the world ſuch a holy ſort of artifice, ſo divine a charm to tie our God to us, as this of reſigning ourſelvés to him. We find the Gibeonites by yielding themſelves vaſſals to the Iſraelites, had their whole army at their back to reſcue them in their danger, Joſh. x. 6, 7. and can we think God is leſs conſiderate of his homagers and dependants? No certainly, his honour as well as his compaſſion is concerned in the relief of thoſe who have ſurrendered themſelves to him.

10. Further yet, when by reſignation we have united our wills to God, we have quite changed the ſcene, and we who when our wills ſtood ſingle, were liable to perpetual defeats, in this bleſſed combination can never be croſſed. When our will is twiſted and involved with God's, the ſame omnipotence which backs his will, does alſo attend ours. God's will, we are ſure, admits of no controul, can never be reſiſted, and we have the ſame ſecurity for ours, ſo long as it concurs with it. By this means all calamities are unſtinged, and even thoſe things which are moſt repugnant to our ſenſitive natures, are yet very agreeable to our ſpirits, when we conſider they are implicitly our own choice, ſince they are certainly

his, whom we have deputed to elect for us. Indeed there can be no face of adverſity ſo averting and formidable, which ſet in this light will not look amiable. We ſee daily how many uneaſineſſes and prejudices men will contentedly ſuffer in purſuit of their wills: And if we have really eſpouſed God's, made his will ours, we ſhall with as great (nay far greater) alacrity embrace its diſtributions, how uneaſy ſoever to our ſenſe; our ſouls will more acquieſce in the accompliſhment of the divine will, than our fleſh can reluct to any ſevere effects of it.

11. Here then is that footing of firm ground, on which whoſoever can ſtand, may indeed do that which *Archimedes* boaſted, move the whole world. He may as to himſelf ſubvert the whole courſe of ſublunary things, unvenom all thoſe calamities which are to others the gall of aſps; and in a further ſenſe verify that evangelical prophecy, of *beating ſwords into plowſhares, and ſpears into pruning hooks*, Iſai. ii. 4. the moſt hoſtile weapons, the moſt adverſe events, ſhall be by him converted into inſtruments of fertility, ſhall only advance his ſpiritual growth.

12. And now who can chuſe but con-

feſs this a much more eligible ſtate, than to be always harraſſed with ſolicitudes and cares, perpetually either fearing future defeats, or bewailing the paſt. And then what can we call it leſs than madneſs or enchantment, for men to act ſo contrary to their own dictates, yea to their very ſenſe and experience, to ſee and acknowledge the inexplicable felicity of a reſigned will, and yet perverſely to hold out theirs, though they can get nothing by it, but the ſullen pleaſure of oppoſing God, and tormenting themſelves? Let us therefore, if not for our duty or eaſe, yet at leaſt for our reputation, the aſſerting ourſelves men of ſobriety and common ſenſe, do that which upon all theſe intereſts we are obliged; let us but give up our wills, and with them we ſhall certainly diveſt ourſelves of all our fruitleſs anxieties, and caſt our burdens upon him who invites us to do ſo. He who bears all our ſins, will bear all our ſorrows, our griefs too: If we will but be content to depoſite them, he will relieve us from all thoſe oppreſſing weights, which make *our ſouls cleave to the duſt*, Pſal. cxix. 25. and will in exchange give us only his *light*, *his pleaſant burden*, Mat. 11. 30. In a word, there will be no care left for us, but that of keeping ourſelves in a capacity of his: Let us but ſecure our love to him, and we are aſ-

certained that *all things ſhall work together for our good*, Rom. viii. 28.

13. To conclude, reſignation and contentment are virtues not only of a near cognation and reſemblance, but they are linked as the cauſe and the effect. Let us but make ſure of reſignation, and content will flow into us without our further induſtry: As on the contrary, whilſt our wills are at defiance with God's, we ſhall always find things at as great defiance with ours. All our ſubtilties or induſtries will never mould them to our ſatisfactions, until we have moulded ourſelves into that pliant temper that we can cordially ſay, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good*, 1 Sam. iii. 18.

If ſoul and body you reſign
To God who rules the earth below,
He is in mercy plentious,
And is to anger very ſlow.

To him who made the great light ſhine,
And of his footſtool made us Lord,
I ſay may we ourſelves reſign
To him who can content afford.

The CLOSE.

THIS ſhort inſtitution of the *Art of Contentment*, cannot more naturally or more deſirably draw to a concluſion, than in the reſort we have given it, in the boſom of Divine Providence. The Roman conquerors, as the laſt pitch of their triumphs, went to the capitol, and laid their garlands in the lap of *Jupiter:* But the Chriſtian has an eaſier way to triumph, to put his crown of thorns (for that is the trophy of his victories) within the arms of his gracious God; there lodge his ſcars, his wants, his ſorrows, and himſelf too, as in the beſt repoſitory.

2. The Goſpel command of *not caring for the morrow*, Mat. vi. 34. and being *careful for nothing*, Phil. iv. 6. nakedly propoſed, might ſeem the abandoning of us to all the calamities of life: But when we are directed to *caſt all our care* upon a gracious and all powerful parent, and are aſſured that *he cares for us*, 1 Pet. v. 7. that *though a woman may forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion of the ſon of her womb, yet will he not forget his children*, Iſai. xlix. 15. this will abundantly ſuperſede all cavil and objection.

Whilſt worldly men truſt in an arm of fleſh, lay up *treaſure on earth*, a prey for *ruſt and moth*, Mat. vi. 19. and *a torment* to themſelves, Jam. v. 3. the Chriſtian has Omnipotence for his ſupport, and a *treaſure in heaven, where no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts*, Mat. vi. 20. Whilſt bold inquirers call in queſtion God's ſecret will, oblige him to their ſub or ſupralapſarian ſchemes, their abſolute or conditional decrees, their grace foreſeen or predetermined; the pious man with awful acquieſcence ſubmits to that which is revealed, reſolves for ever to obey, but never to diſpute: as knowing that the beloved diſciple leaned on his Maſter's boſom; but it is the thieves and traitors part to go about to rifle it.

3. It is ſurely a modeſt demand in the behalf of God almighty, that we ſhould allow him as much privilege in his world, as every peaſant claims in his cottage; to be maſter there, and diſpoſe of his houſehold as he thinks beſt: To *ſay to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to his ſervant, Do this, and he doth it*, Mat. viii. 9. And if we would afford him this liberty, there would be an immediate end put to all clamour and complaint.

4. We make it our daily prayer that the *will* of God *may be done on earth as it is in heaven*, with a ready, ſwift, and uninterrupted conſtancy. As it is giant-like rebellion to ſet up our will againſt his, ſo is it mad perverſeneſs to ſet it up againſt our own; be diſpleaſed that our requeſts are granted, and repine that his, and therewith our will is done. It were indeed not only good manners, but good policy, to obſerve the direction of the heathen, and *follow God*, not prejudge his determination by ours; but in a modeſt ſuſpenſion of our thoughts, *hearken what the Lord God will ſay concerning us, for he will ſpeak peace unto his people, and to his ſaints that they turn not again.*

5. Or however upon ſurpriſe we may indulge to a paſſionate affection, and dote upon our illegitimate off-ſpring, our darling guilts or follies, as *David* did upon that child, who was the price of murder and adultery: Yet when the brat is taken from us, when the *child is dead*, it will become us to do as he did, riſe from our ſullen poſture on the earth, and *worſhip in the houſe of the Lord*, 2 Sam. xii. 20. It will behove us, as he ſays in another place, to *lay our hand upon our mouth, becauſe it was his doing*, and with holy *Job* chap. xl. 4, 5. when charged with his murmurings,

Behold I am vile, what ſhall I anſwer? once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer: yea twice, but I will proceed no further.

6. *Socrates* rightly ſaid of contentment, oppoſing it to the riches of fortune and opinion, that it is the wealth of nature, for it gives every thing that we have learnt to want, and really need: But reſignation is the riches of grace, beſtowing all things that a chriſtian not only needs, but can deſire, even almighty God himſelf. He indeed, as the ſchool-men teach, is the objective happineſs of the creature: He who is the fountain of being, muſt be alſo of bleſſedneſs; and though this be only communicable to us, when we have put off that *fleſh which cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, and laid aſide that *corruption* which cannot *inherit corruption*, 1 Cor. xv. 50. yet even in this life, we may make approaches to that bleſſed ſtate, by acts of reſignation and denial of ourſelves. It was the generous ſaying of *Socrates* being about to die unto his friend; O *Crito*, ſince it is the will of God, ſo let it be: *Anytus* and *Melytus* may kill me, but cannot hurt me. But ſuch a reſignation as it is infinitely a greater duty to a chriſtian, ſo it is alſo a more firm ſecurity. In that caſe it is not the martyr, but Jeſus of Nazareth who is thus perſecuted, and he who attacks him

will find *it is hard to kick againſt the pricks*, Acts ix. 5.

7. There could not be a greater inſtance of the profligate ſenſuality of the Iſraelites, than that they murmured for want of *leeks and onions*, Numb. xi. 5. when they ate angels food, and had bread rained down from heaven. It is impoſſible for the ſoul that is ſenſible of God almighty's favour, to repine at any earthly preſſure. *The Lord is my ſhepherd*, ſaith David, *therefore can I lack nothing*, Pſal. xxiii. 1. And *thou haſt put gladneſs into my heart, more than when their corn, and wine, and oil increaſed*, Pſal. iv. 7. and in paſſionate raptures he cries out, Pſal. lxxiii. 25, 26, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee? my fleſh and my heart faileth: but God is the ſtrength of my heart, and my portion for ever.* And likewiſe Pſal. xlvi. 1, 2, 3, 5. *God is our hope and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed; and though the hills be carried into the midſt of the ſea. Though the waters thereof rage and ſwell, and though the mountains ſhake at the tempeſt of the ſame. If God be in the midſt of us, we ſhall not be removed, he will help us, and that right early.* Let us therefore poſſeſs ourſelves of this ſupport, and as the prophet adviſes, Iſai.

viii. 12, 13. *neither fear, nor be afraid,* in any exigence how great ſoever; but *be ſtill and quiet, and ſanctify the Lord of hoſts himſelf, and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread.*

As God that gives us many Gifts,
That to us is not due,
May he beſtow his Grace on all
That reads this Volumn through:

For they will find that it contains
What well deſerves applauſe;
For nothing in it contradicts
God's juſt revealed Laws.

CONTENTMENT.

FORGET not that thy ſtation on earth is appointed by the wiſdom of the eternal; who knoweth thy heart, who ſeeth the vanity of all thy wiſhes, and who often in mercy, denieth thy requeſts.

Yet for all reaſonable deſires, for all honeſt endeavours, his benevolence hath eſtabliſhed, in the nature of things, a probability of ſucceſs.

The uneaſineſs thou feeleſt, the misfortunes thou bewaileſt, behold the root from whence they ſpring, even thine own folly, thine own pride, thine own diſtempered fancy.

Murmur not therefore at the diſpenſation of God, but correct thine own heart: neither ſay within thyſelf, If I had wealth, or power, or leiſure, I ſhould be happy; for know, they all of them bring to their ſeveral poſſeſſors their peculiar inconveniencies.

The poor man ſeeth not the vexations and anxieties of the rich, he feeleth not the dicuffilties and perplexities of power, neither knoweth he the weariſomneſs of

leiſure; and therefore it is that he repineth at his own lot.

But envy not the appearance of happineſs in any man, for thou knoweſt not his ſecret griefs.

To be ſatisfied with a little, is the greateſt wiſdom; and he that increaſeth his riches, increaſeth his cares: But a contented mind is a hidden treaſure, and trouble findeth it not.

Yet if thou ſuffereſt not the allurements of fortune to rob thee of juſtice, or temperance, or charity, or modeſty, even riches themſelves ſhall not make thee unhappy.

But hence ſhalt thou learn, that the cup of felicity, pure and unmixed, is by no means a draught for mortal man.

Virtue is the race which God hath ſet him to run, and happineſs the goal; which none can arrive at until he hath finiſhed his courſe, and received his crown in the manſions of eternity.

After the theological and rational arguments that have been uſed for Contentment, the author begs leave to conclude with a ſolemn Prayer for reſignation to the Providence of God in all ſituations of life.

O GOD moſt holy, O Lord moſt mighty, O thou ſupreme Governor of the univerſe, who governs all things by thy almighty power, and who by thy wiſdom haſt ordered the ſeveral degrees, and different ſtates and conditions of men in this world; 'grant me full contentment of mind in that ſtate thou haſt been pleaſed to place me, and humillty to acquieſce in thy diſpoſal of me, and grace faithfully to diſcharge thoſe duties it requires of me. Grant me patience under all loſſes and diſappointments, and remove all repining and envy far from me. O God I am thy creature; my entire dependence is on thee; grant therefore that my faith, my hope, and my truſt may always be in thee, and that my hope and my truſt may not be in vain. I will therefore take no anxious thought for my life, what I ſhall eat, or what I ſhall drink, or wherewithal I ſhall be clothed, ſeeing thou knoweſt I have need of all theſe things, and that if I ſeek thy righteouſneſs, all theſe things

ſhall be added unto me, out of thy great bounty; nor will I be diſmayed at any calamity thou in thy wiſe Providence ſhall order for me, ſeeing that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love and fear thee. O God grant that I may with a conſtant evenneſs of ſpirit embrace all thy diſpoſals, foraſmuch as I know not what to aſk, and cannot deſire abſolutely one event rather than another, without preſumption, and making myſelf the judge of all that train of future things which thy wiſdom has ſo juſtly concealed from my view. O my God I commit my life, and the deareſt concerns that attend it to thy diſpoſal, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt my Saviour, beſeeching thee for his ſake, by ſuch ways and means as thou ſeeſt fit, to bring me to eternal life. And grant, O moſt holy God, that whether I live, I may live unto the Lord, or whether I die, I may die unto the Lord; ſo that whether I live or die, I may be the Lord's; which I moſt humbly beg for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

Grant, Lord, I e'er may be content
In this thy world, to which I'm ſent;
Great God be thou my portion here,
I'll be content, and thee revere.

Poetic Compositions.

By J. SEARSON.

A Common Prayer for the preſent Times.

SINCE we are taught in ſcripture word
To pray for friends and foes,
Then let us pray for each one's good,
Even thoſe who us oppoſe.

May heav'n ſhow'r down its bleſſings ſoon
On this our riſing ſtate,
So we'll be happy night and noon—
Enjoy ev'n bleſſings great.

When Providence our ways direct,
We ſoon ſhall happy be;
We'll love like brothers and reſpect,
And ſtill may we be free.

Sins of the ſtates are our worſt foes,
Let this be in our creed;
For thoſe who break God's holy laws
May puniſh'd be indeed.

May ev'ry morn and ev'ning pray'r,
Repeat this juſt petition;
Lord, may we from our ſins forbear,
Thou'lt pity our condition.

Juſt heav'n, to light all dark ſchemes bring,
That would divide the land;
And may the worthy ever ſing,
May peace moſt purely ſtand.

Great God, who rules this world below,
Divert harm far away;
That we may to thy judgments bow,
Bleſs'd in this land to ſtay.

Poetic Deſcription of the preſent Times, they wearing an alarming appearance.

NOT long ago I paſs'd along
To ſeek for themes for a new ſong,
And view the parties that's moſt ſtrong
Now that the time's alarming.

Some cries up England, and ſome France,
That they may learn *morhoop* to dance,
Although they ſhould in blood advance,
The times are ſo alarming.

Our ſhips and treaſure are no more,
Our property cloſe to our ſhore,
Muſt we lie down to France therefore,
Becauſe the time's alarming?

There's Tom, and Ned, and Richard too,
Our politics they will purſue,
As if nought elſe they had to do;
Which ſhews the time's alarming.

I think the time will not be long,
Before proud France, in thouſands ſtrong,
Invade the land, to help our ſong,
The times are ſo alarming.

O blood, confuſion, and diſtreſs,
See on our country how they preſs,
A bloody war we ſure may gueſs,
Makes this our time alarming.

France now deſpiſes all fair means,
For peace, although we uſe ſuch pains;
So now diſtreſs we ſee, not gains,
Which makes the times alarming.

What ſays the fair American,
When thouſands ſtrangers in our land,
She ſcarce knows where to give her hand,
The times are ſo alarming.

War, war, how dreadful is the cry!
Women and children now lie by,

In terror ſure they're like to die,
The times are ſo alarming.

Hope now is almoſt at a ſtand,
While enemies ſurround the land,
E'en merchants now can't trade command
Becauſe the time's alarming.

England again and ſtates agree,
In politics as you may ſee,
To keep our friends from bondage free,
Altho' the time's alarming.

Let's look for mercy from above,
To re-inſtate our former love,
We'll then be happy as a dove,
And time then leſs alarming.

But if we peace cannot obtain,
Content with war, we'll ſtrive to gain,
So as to mitigate our pain,
Altho' the time's alarming.

Great Waſhington is now retir'd,
Altho' by all the world admir'd;
His counſel yet may be requir'd,
Becauſe the time's alarming.

Farewell to thoſe, wiſh poets well,
Becauſe the truth I to you tell,
As in this land I now do dwell,
Altho' the time's alarming.

Having been ſome time confined by a ſevere indiſpoſition in the hoſpital of Philadelphia, during which I compoſed the following lines on that charitable inſtitution.

" How many drink the cup of baleful grief,
" Or eat the bitter bread of miſery."
THOMSON'S SEASONS.

HOW hard their fate who drink afflictions cup,
And e'en to the dregs muſt ſip it up,
Alas! theſe bodies here are made of clay,
And dire diſeaſes oft lie in their way.

The kind, beneficent and tender hand,
In pity to their ſufferings gives command;
Commands relief from dear humanity,
To eaſe great pains, and ſet the afflicted free.

How bleſs'd are they, who ever doing good,
Gives phyſic for their pains, as alſo food,
To ſooth and give them comfort in diſtreſs,
Which will encreaſe their wealth nor make it leſs.

Bleſſed are thoſe (we're told) who help the poor,
Nor ſend the afflicted from their wealthy door,
We are aſſured by God himſelf above,
The good man acts from tenderneſs and love.

He lays up treaſure, in yon heav'ns high,
Where good men go when from this earth they fly,
What kind attention to the patient's paid,
By thoſe who have their charge, tis truly ſaid.

How clean and decent here is every thing,
Thoſe who nurſe, do comfort to the patients bring,
'Tis very pleaſing to the human mind,
To have ſuch kind relief as here we find.

The houſe is ſpacious call'd the *Hoſpital*,
So elegant and neat take it in all;
Bleſs'd is the memory of the firſt founder,
And if in heav'n he's found, 'tis no wonder.

The beneficent man, who doth much good,
And helps the poor with phyſic and with food;
Has God above a ſure reward,
Who will moſt ſurely all good acts regard.

Supremely bleſs'd are they who do much good,
Who heal the ſick and give the hungry food:
Fair well dear Philadelphia, fare ye well,
Your praiſe in other climes I ſoon may tell.

An ACROSTIC.

HIS name throughout the ſtates well known,
In Europe too his acts were ſhewn,
Such were his greatneſs all will own.

Exceeding all that tongue can tell,
Xerxes the king didn't act ſo well;
Could letters talk, as letters lead,
Excellency would great be made.
Let rich and poor, let young and old,
Learn wiſdom which is pure as gold;
Ev'n to walk in prudential ways,
Nor in this walk make ſhort delays;
Convinc'd that wiſdom e'er will ſhine,
Yea, and all know it is divine.

Gracious, humane, continued good,
Exceeds all wiſdom underſtood.
O fill my heart, eternal King,
Replete with ev'ry virtuous thing;
Greatneſs and goodneſs will agree,
Even in time and in eternity.

Where ſhall we find ſo great a name,
And ſo much prudence and great fame?
Such brav'ry great, with courage mix'd,
His fame to future time hath fix'd;
In ev'ry part of the known land
None but hath heard of his command.
Great actions are from heav'n above,
To all who honour God and love.
O bleſſed is retirement,
None's happy but with pure content.

An ACROSTIC.

SUBLIMELY great, the philoſophic mind
In Newton ſhines, unequall'd, unconfin'd,
Regions and cauſes, in dark chaos loſt,
In his ſolutions cleareſt luſtre boaſt.
Sunk in obſcurity, of proof bereft,
Aſtronomy in error's maze was left:
At *Newton's* call, uncertainty withdrew;
Conviction ſpoke, and wiſdom roſe to view.

No more the miſt of ignorance aſſails,
Enlighten'd truth's pleaſing form prevails.
With rev'rend wonder and ſupreme delight,
The whole creation opens to our ſight;
Orb upon orb, in awful order plac'd,
Newton explor'd, and all their motions
trac'd.

The following remarkable Prophecy was written by that noted and prophetical writer, in 1651, *that is,* 147 *years ſince.*

GREAT earthquakes and commotions by ſea and land ſhall come in the year of God 1779. Great wars in Germany and America in 1780. The deſtruction of popery, or Babylon's fall, in the year 1790. God will be known by many in the year 1795. This will produce a great man. The ſtars will wander, and the moon turn as blood in 1800. Africa, Aſia, and America will tremble in 1803. A great earthquake over all the world in 1805: God will be univerſally known by all; then a general reformation and peace for ever, when the people ſhall learn war no more.

On the STARRY HEAVENS.

The Compoſer of the following Hymn was the noted and juſtly admired Mr. Addiſon, in his Spectator, Vol. 6. No. 465, and recommended by the reverend Mr. James Hervey, in his Meditations.

THE ſpacious firmament on high,
With all the blue etherial ſky,
And ſpangled heav'ns, a ſhining frame,
Their great original proclaim.

Th' unwearied ſun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's pow'r diſplay,
And publiſhes to ev'ry land
The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the ev'ning ſhades prevail,
The moon takes up the wond'rous tale,
And nightly to the liſt'ning earth
Repeats the ſtory of her birth;

While all the ſtars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And ſpread the truth from pole to pole.

What though in ſolemn ſilence all
Move round the dark terreſtrial ball;

What though no real voice nor ſound
Amidſt their radient orbs be found:

In reaſon's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
For ever ſinging, as they ſhine,
The hand that made us is Divine.

Poetic Deſcription of Auguſt.

SEE blooming Auguſt, ſmiling kind,
Elates the careful farmer's mind!
Hear how the gentle ſwelling breeze,
In mildneſs whiſpers through the trees;
And wafting calmly o'er the plain,
Bends into waves the yellow grain!
The dog-ſtar now, with raging heat,
Makes the reluctant hind retreat;
And reſt his weary limbs a while,
That he again may work and toil.
The trees with juicy apples bend,
And pears from loaded boughs deſcend;
The peaches with a bluſhing dye,
Invite the taſte, and glad the eye;
While balmy flow'rets all around,
With richeſt honours cloathe the ground.
The ſickles now the ſwains prepare,
And joyful to the fields repair,
Jocund to reap, with buſy hands,

The produce of theſe ſtates and lands:
Their work with plenty Ceres crowns,
And in rich crops their hardſhip drowns.
With hurry ev'ry farmer teems,
And all one ſcene of bus'neſs ſeems,
While frugal mortals life employ,
In buſtle, labour, care and joy:
Now ſee the youth of all our ſtates,
Who all combine to enrich our gates:
May providence their way now guide,
So that we join and not divide;
May ev'ry one in this agree,
And monthly bring us harmony—
So ſhall we ev'ry good purſue,
Till mild September comes in view.

Trust in God.

Job xiii. 15. *Though he ſlay me, yet will I truſt in him.*

THOU God ſupreme, that orders all things well,
My wants, my pains, my griefs, I'll to thee tell,
And ſhould thy care correct me in my way,
Still, O my gracious God, I'll on thee ſtay:
But ſhould thou ſlay me, compaſſionate God,
Thy comforts thou canſt ſhew even in thy rod.
O holy, holy, ſovereign God above,
Through our Redeemer's blood I beg thy love.

Correct me, then, whene'er I go aſtray,
And through the maze of life lead me thy way;
So that in bliſs with thee I may be found:
Th' glory and praiſe will e'er to thee redound.
To Father, Son, and Spirit bleſſings be,
Through every age, and to eternity.

Farewell, my candid Readers, fare ye well:
The Muſes' truths hereafter I may tell.

Lyric Poems.

Remember your Creator, &c. Eccl. xii.

CHILDREN, to your Creator, God,
Your early honors pay,
While vanity and youthful blood,
Would tempt your thoughts aſtray.

The memory of his mighty name,
Demands your firſt regard;
Nor dare indulge a meaner flame,
'Till you have lov'd the Lord.

Be wiſe, and make his favor ſure,
Before the mournful days,
When youth & mirth are known no more,
And life and ſtrength decays.

No more the bleſſings of a feaſt
Shall reliſh on the tongue,

The heavy ear forgets the taſte
And pleaſure of a ſong.

Old age, with all her diſmal train,
Invades your golden years,
With ſighs and groans, and raging pain,
And death that never ſpares.

What will you do when light departs,
And leaves your withering eyes,
Without one beam to cheer you hearts,
From the ſuperior ſkies?

How will you meet God's frowning brow,
Or ſtand before his ſeat,
While nature's old ſupporters bow,
Nor bear their tott'ring weight?

Can you expect your feeble arms
Shall make a ſtrong defence,
When death! with terrible alarms,
Summons the pris'ner hence?

The ſilver bands of nature burſt,
And let the building fall;
The fleſh goes down to mix with duſt,
Its vile original.

Laden with guilt, a heavy load!
Uncleans'd and unforgiv'n,
The ſoul returns t' an angry God,
To be ſhut out from heav'n.

The Welcome Meſſenger.

LORD, when we ſee a ſaint of thine
Lie gaſping on his breath,
With longing eyes, and looks divine,
Smiling and pleas'd in death;

How we could e'en contend to lay
Our limbs upon that bed!
We aſk thine envoy to convey
Our ſpirits in his ſtead.

Our ſouls are riſing on the wing,
To venture in his place;
For when grim death has loſt his ſting,
He has an angel's face.

Jeſus, then purge my crimes away,
'Tis guilt creates my fears;
'Tis guilt gives death his fierce array,
And all the arms it bears.

Oh! if my threat'ning ſins were gone,
And death had loſt his ſting,
I could invite the angel on,
And chide his lazy wing.

Away theſe interpoſing days,
And let the lovers meet;
The angel has a cold embrace,
But kind, and ſoft and ſweet.

I'd leap at once my ſeventy years,

I'd ruſh into his arms,
And loſe my breath, and all my cares,
Amidſt thoſe heav'nly charms.

Joyful I'd lay this body down,
And leave the lifeleſs clay,
Without a ſigh, without a groan,
And ſtretch and ſoar away.

Sincere Praiſe.

ALMIGHTY Maker, God!
How wond'rous is thy name!
Thy glories how diffus'd abroad
Through the creation's frame!

Nature in ev'ry dreſs,
Her humble homage pays,
And finds a thouſand ways t' expreſs
Thine undiſſembled praiſe.

In native white and red
The roſe and lily ſtand,
And free from pride, their beauties ſpread
To ſhew thy ſkilful hand.

The lark mounts up the ſky;
With [illegible] ſong,
And bears her maker's praiſe on high,
Upon her artful [illegible].

My ſoul would riſe and ſing
To her Creator too;
Fain would my tongue adore my King,
And pay the worſhip due.

But pride, that buſy ſin,
Spoils all that I perform;
Curs'd pride that creeps ſecurely in,
And ſwells a haughty worm.

Thy glories I abate,
Or praiſe thee with deſign;
Some of thy favors I forget,
Or think the merit mine.

The very ſongs I frame,
Are faithleſs to thy cauſe,
And ſteal the honors of thy name
To build their own applauſe.

Create my ſoul anew,
Elſe all my worſhip's vain;
This wretched heart will ne'er be true,
Until 'tis form'd again.

Deſcend, celeſtial fire,
And ſeize me from above,
Melt me in flames of pure deſire,
A ſacrifice to love.

Let joy and worſhip ſpend
The remnant of my days,
And to my God, my ſoul, aſcend,
In ſweet perfumes of praiſe.

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